



EXPONENT II

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Whether you're a "long time reader, first time writer" to *Exponent II* or a seasoned pro at putting your life in print, we invite you to enter this year's personal essay contest. This is your chance to tell *Exponent* readers about some aspect of your life or some thoughts you have had that you would like to express —and possibly to win some money. First place will be awarded \$300 and will be published in the newspaper. Any honorable mention essays will also be printed in the paper, and all

other submissions will be passed on to our Readers Committee for consideration. We have published many of these essays in past issues of *Exponent II*.

The deadline for submissions is February 1, 2004. Mail your entries by e-mail to ExponentII@aol.com or submit disks or hard copy entries to Essay Contest, *Exponent II*, P.O. Box 128, Arlington, MA 02476. Please include your name, address, and e-mail address on your entry.

The purpose of *Exponent II* is to provide a forum for Mormon women to share their life experiences in an atmosphere of trust and acceptance. This exchange allows us to better understand each other and shape the direction of our lives. Our common bond is our connection to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and our commitment to women. We publish this paper as a living history in celebration of the strength and diversity of women.

Exponent II

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Cover design of the South Manitou Lighthouse on South Manitou Island (off the shore of Lake Michigan) by Lenoir Deans of Traverse City, Michigan.

A Year Like This One

by Susan Hatch

I don't remember ever having a year like this; it's been a sad one. I'm middle-aged, no two ways about it. I'm forty-six; even if I live till I'm ninety, I'm more than halfway there. Definitely old enough to see many a loved one's saga unfold. Maybe being at the mid point has something to do with what's been happening in my life. This year things have been off kilter, skewed—mid-life filled with abrupt endings and final moves. God seemingly saying, "Checkmate. End of game." My smart, faithful cousin, Steve Gray, 48; my funny, creative nephew, David Thomas, 28; my kind, helpful cousin Craig Livingston, 47; my talented old uncle Paul Fillmore—all have died since last September. In addition, some of my dearest friends have lost loved ones to suicide, SARS, and mental illness.

Good and pleasant things have happened, too, of course—a wedding, a graduation, recitals, the return of spring—but not enough to offset the sad news that keeps pounding the shore.

So, how do we stay afloat when the undertow seems strong? Love, family support, conversations with God, laughter, favorite music, natural beauty—the basics. Friendship and distracting entertainment. Music. Faith. Good words, lovingly written, spoken, and shared. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

I am surrounded by words. I own thousands of books and hoard layers of papers with valuable writing on them: articles ripped from magazines and passages photocopied or jotted down from books; notes of ideas I've had while driving; poems on all colors of parchment; flyers and memos received about important things to pay attention to in the near future; bits and pieces that send me on mini-quests for more information. I save words in overflowing manila folders—Creativity, Rumi, Candles & Candlelight, Memory, Ocean, Humor, Wildwood, Ritual, Trees, Interesting Things People Say about God. I tape words to my computer monitor, stick them on my fridge and bulletin board. As a human word processor, I'm currently writing the forty-first volume of my personal journal. Wordy papers pile on my desk in topplely, precarious ways. Inside the computer, I store e-mails and letters, essays and talks, lists of books read and books to get around to reading, records of my kids' activities, calendars of significant family dates. Surely with so many words available, words would never fail me.

I can dip into a book of poems to rescue a feeling I thought I'd lost or identify an emotion I never even tried to put into language. Some of the words I like best are clustered into questions like "What if we had no limits?" or "What do you think?" or "Are there as many ways to get things right as there are to get them wrong?" or "Why did I act like such a blooming idiot?" I can read a novel

and live in another country or time. I can stay in touch with distant friends via the magic of e-mail messages and know far more about the details of their lives than I did ten years ago when we wrote by snail mail and shared only an occasional phone call or catch-up visit. I can save words I love for return visits of "Aha!" or "That's just exactly what I feel." I am in awe of the power of arranging the alphabet into creative new ideas. Words abound. Words give meaning. Words enlighten.

The words in this Midwest issue are no different. When I was asked to be the guest editor of this issue, I started thinking of people who could write to enrich the lives of *Exponent II* readers, and what you see in the following pages shows the breadth of experience and talent here in the Heartland. These wonderful women live from the heart. They care passionately about the work they do, the relationships they engage in, and the quality of the lives they lead. They are busy and sometimes overwhelmed, just like you are. They have less time than they wish. They are thoughtful about their religion and their church. They experience tragedy, loss, and pain, but they're also funny, creative, and wise. Best of all, they are my friends. I started by thinking of friends and asking them to write, and the circle expanded to include more and more.

May their carefully chosen words bring you comfort, distraction, tears and laughs, and new ideas. Good words to get through life. *

Call for Writers

Future issues of *Exponent II* will include articles on 1) women and how they deal with power and 2) single women in the church. We are also interested in hearing from quilters who would like to talk

about their work and who have photographs of their quilts, women who are involved in types of sports that are not those usually embraced by women, and writers who have something to share

about the church from an international perspective. If you are interested in writing on any of these subjects, please contact us at exponentII@aol.com or at our postal box address.

A Sense of Joy

The following article is adapted from a workshop given at the April 2002 Midwest Pilgrims Retreat

by Alison Takenaka

*Joyful, joyful we adore thee,
God of glory, Lord of love;
Hearts unfold like flowers before thee,
Opening to the sun above.*

—Henry van Dyke, “Hymn to Joy”

I am a novice at the game of life. The older I get, the more I realize that I don’t know anything about everything, nor everything about anything. Many things I once thought I knew have faded into obscurity or shifted to ambiguity. But my quest for joy is a passionate constant that hasn’t waned with time.

When misery begins to overwhelm my world view, I try to sharpen my sense of joy—to bring it to a concrete level—by asking myself these questions:

- 1) *What does joy look, sound, feel, taste, or smell like?*
- 2) *What gives me the most joy?*
- 3) *What blocks joy for me?*
- 4) *If a friend asked me for a “Guide to a Joyful Life,” how would I respond?*

This exercise helps me to appreciate the little joys that often get lost in the busyness of living—the sweet grip of my toddler’s hand as we comb the beach, sunlight filtering through a gold autumn canopy, glittering snowflakes floating on the air of an Advent evening. I’m forced to recognize the negativity that detracts and distracts me from joy—fear, envy, loneliness, panic. When I think about giving advice to a beloved friend, I tap into wisdom I never knew I had. Often the presence or absence of joy in my life boils down to whether I am finely tuned to sense it or not.

An information junkie by nature, I routinely scan printed material for specks of truth that may improve

my interpretation of people and experience. My files are bulging proof of the joy that surrounds me. Despite the news of war, terrorism, political assassinations, poverty, and domestic atrocities, joy whispers from many quiet corners of the print universe. So when a Relief Society president asked me to design a filing system for my ward that presented provocative thoughts on finding more joy, I simply sifted through my mixed-up files and inserted the best of what I found.

The resulting J.O.Y. Book became a balanced system for how to sense joy more clearly and more frequently through developing a greater love for “Jesus,” “Others,” and “Yourself.” It’s a dynamic scrapbook of wisdom that has saved me from many of the spiritual, social, and emotional crises that loom over busy women in a demanding world. It’s not fool-proof, but it helps me stay loyal to what truths I’ve found. It helps me remember to love and feel loved.

I’ll never forget the time when a girlfriend stopped me after I had taught a gospel doctrine class to invite me over for lunch so she could hear my advice on how to read the scriptures. I remember her sitting perched at the edge of a plush armchair, scanning a brainstormed list from my J.O.Y. binder called “Fifty Ways to Read the Scriptures.” It included possibilities ranging from “make a list of all the gospel topics that interest you and read the scriptures that relate to each topic” to “buy a cheap version of the scriptures, tear out pages, tape them to the back of your cereal box, and read them during breakfast.” I remember the laughter and shock on her face, the raised eyebrows and the extra-wide blue eyes. Finally she looked up with disheartened concern and said, “These are great, but do

they really count?” “‘Count’ with whom?” I asked. But she couldn’t answer me.

She did tell me that she had been guilt-ridden for years because she never felt spiritually “uplifted” when she studied the scriptures the “right” way. She wanted to be more like her husband, who woke up each morning and did his daily half-hour, sequential scripture study before going off to work. He didn’t understand the spiritual funk she was in; his was the “correct” way to read. She thought that her key to joy was becoming more like him, and she never considered that her dialogue with Christ was more likely to happen if she adopted her own, not her husband’s, study habits.

I guess this makes me question whether Jesus—who has a perfect sense of how different we are from each other—expects us to approach him only through a handful of ways that others have “authorized.” Somehow I doubt it. I think that my ongoing conversation with deity is a personal matter and that I can be wholly unconcerned with how others commune with God. My friend’s misery probably didn’t spring from her desire to read the scriptures, and her love for Christ wasn’t lacking. But gaining her husband’s acceptance and heeding the voices of convention took precedence over her own spiritual sense.

I’ve seen too many women too often put their love for others ahead of their love for themselves—women who “lose themselves” in vortices of demands—their husbands’, children’s, friends’, employers’. They are resigned to their “calling” as a kind of contemporary Christian martyr, thinking that something in our gospel commands them to serve as everyone’s favorite whipping girl. Very

often when talking to my Mormon girlfriends, I get the feeling that they don't possess the joy that they deserve for being the kind, patient, hard-working, charitable, faithful, funny people that they are. They're so used to being taken for granted that they're blind to the best sides of themselves.

I too am a Christian woman. I try to emulate Christ, but I don't feel called to be a martyr—drawn and quartered by somebody's extraneous needs. I work toward becoming more "perfect" by becoming a whole person who responds to those who are truly in need, not by becoming a "perfect" lamb who's led calmly to the slaughter by self-centered people.

My sense of Christ-like love is grounded in my belief that the goodness inside me is in harmony with the goodness inside others. When I feel a resonance, I can act quickly to aid another person who is sincerely in need of my help, and I can deftly avoid the frivolous needs of others who want to lean on me out of habit, laziness, self-pity, irresponsibility, or any number of mysterious reasons that I may never know.



Warning

*When I am an old woman I shall wear purple
With a red hat which doesn't go, and doesn't suit me.
But maybe I ought to practise a little now?
So people who know me are not too shocked and surprised
When suddenly I am old, and start to wear purple.*

Something about Jenny Joseph's poem has sunk deep into my bones. I am not numerically "old" at present, but to me this poem has more to do with hearing and obeying my truest Self—the person inside me that changes with the seasons, flows with the tides, dances with the sun, and runs with the moon. This poem is about paying less attention to what my neighbors think and paying more respect to what I need for me. A wise friend recently observed: "If you don't take care of yourself, no one else will think to."

I want to become the best person I can be, regardless of what is "proper" in anyone else's judgment. I'm

more concerned with letting my "rightness" be gauged by the insights I receive in meditation than with allowing cultural opinions to determine how I should think, what I should say, and how I should act. I'm convinced that God knows me better than anyone else, better than I even know myself. So my prime tasks are to connect with myself, tap into God's omniscience, and then find the courage to do what's really best as I relate to myself and others.

There is such an immense pressure to "fit in," to "be normal," to "be cool," or to "keep up with the Joneses." On my bad days, I know why I succumb to cultural prescriptions so often: because ignoring trends and expectations exacts high social costs (odd looks, silent rejection, explicit criticism, subtle alienation, suppression, isolation, covert ridicule). But is the price of marching to my own drum worth the payoff in personal peace and wild freedom? On my truth-telling days, I think it's at least a fair exchange, and often I think that I reap an abundance of self-love that spills over into the reservoir of energy and care that I can give to my relationships with God and others. Besides, sometimes when I high-step and thump my own savage beat, other women drop their porcelain façades and join my parade. Then we're more and merrier with purple and red banners madly waving side-by-side.

I feel entitled to joy. It's one of my positive birthrights from the Fall of humankind (see 2 Nephi 2:23–25). But this inheritance comes with some cautions. There is no well-marked path to joy, no

instruction manual with neat and tidy bullets. Nearly every positive element of my life—however miniscule—could be a negative component of someone else's. And the question of what combination of parts will produce the maximum amount of joy in any life is an impossible equation.

My sense of joy is fragile, like a new motor skill that my body isn't proficient in. Like my other senses, which could be debilitated in an instant, my sense of joy sometimes teeters on the edge of forgetfulness just when I'm convinced that it's lodged in my memory forever. My perception gets so warped by the misery of the real-time rat race that I wouldn't know joy if it grabbed me by the hair and screamed, "HERE I AM!"

One friend's theory is that "joy is acting out of love." But loving is a risk; every bond enables a break. The love that produces our greatest joys also carries the greatest potential for pain. The most remarkable connections are often the ones that survive against all odds. But our handling of pain is the catalyst that transforms the bitter risk of love to the sweet security of joy.

Joy. I can't buy it, build it, conjure it, copy it, bake it, or fake it. But I can—and do—choose to increase my love . . . to brave the pain . . . to sense more joy.

*Ever singing, march we onward,
Victors in the midst of strife,
Joyful music leads us sunward
In the triumph song of life. **

LIFE IS GOOD

An interview with Catherine Stokes by Linda Hoffman Kimball



had a great aunt in Chicago who had just gotten married who was too old to have any children. She wanted someone to help her in her old age, so by virtue of birth order, I got to go. That turned out to be a blessing for me. For example, I was the only one of my siblings who got to go through school.

Ex2: Do you mean high school, college, elementary?

CS: All of the above. They may have had one or two or three years. Schooling was not a priority in the South then. There were no electric lights, no running water, no flushing toilets.

Ex2: A little like Exponent retreats in New Hampshire.

CS: Never been to one of those. People are always asking me to go camping. I tell them I camped in my youth in that shack in Mississippi. My idea of camping is a hotel without room service twenty-four hours. Been there. Done that. No thanks.

Ex2: Tell us about heading North.

CS: I remember very vividly that night we left. I must have been about three or four. I remember the moon casting shadows on the moss hanging off the trees. I remember riding in a car. I don't think I had been in a car before. We went to a place in Louisiana to visit some of my great-uncle's relatives, and we had supper there. They had fried fish and spaghetti for supper. In Mississippi, we were given our food on a tin pan and then we'd find a place on the floor to sit and eat. That night in Louisiana I was given a real plate. I remember the feel of this new thing in

my hands. I looked around for a place to sit on the floor. I remember the feel of my great-aunt's hand on my arm lifting me up and hearing her say very tenderly, "We don't do that anymore."

Ex2: A new life for you.

CS: Exactly. It was a very interesting time for the country, being at the tail end of the Depression. But in our area in the South, the Depression came and went. Nobody knew because nothing changed. There was no television then where you could see people jumping out of windows in New York. We were thinking that everybody was pretty much like us. Except we knew that the people who lived in the big house, who owned all land (we would have called it a plantation a few years earlier), lived well. But we thought that's how things were supposed to be.

Ex2: Other early memories?

CS: Though my great-aunt was uneducated, she was wise in many ways. She wanted me to know my sisters and brothers. Her husband, my "Papa" (Aaron Moore), would take me back to Mississippi during the Christmas break. What you got at Christmastime was a couple of oranges, a peppermint stick, a few nuts, and some store-bought cheese. We thought that was what Christmas meant. You would go around to the relatives and neighbors. The women would have baked for the week before and put all these cakes and pies and tea cupcakes in the pie safe. And you'd go around and say, "Christmas give!" and they'd give you some of the goodies. I think of that and realize that we were probably closer to the meaning of Christmas there in those times than we are when people shop their eyeballs out.

Cathy Stokes is a woman of smarts and spirit. The first black nurse in the U.S. to hold an administrative position in a state nurses association, Cathy is now a force to be reckoned with for infection control in health care for the State of Illinois Department of Public Health. A world traveler, Cathy leaves her home in Chicago for her work, for her assignments with Church Public Affairs, and for her love of the many people around the globe who "by mutual consent" are her relatives. She has been to such exotic ports of call as Ghana, Fiji, Japan, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, and Monticello, Utah. She is as well known for her barbecued rib dinners as she is for her generosity of spirit, her commitment to the Gospel, and her sometimes saucy turn of phrase. In the following interview, Cathy shares some thoughts on her childhood, her education, her career, and her experience as a Mormon since 1979.

Ex2: Tell us about "Cathy Stokes: The Early Years."

CS: I am child of the rural South, born into severe poverty in 1936. I was the youngest of six—five surviving—children of a sharecropper family. We

EX2: Sounds like trick-or-treating.

CS: Yeah, it was like that. My brothers and cousins would distract the ladies who cooked all that good stuff, and they'd go in and snatch a few. The ladies knew, they knew what the boys were doing. That was part of the Christmas ritual.

Ex2: You mentioned that education was a major part of your life. Where did you go to school?

CS: I had all my schooling here in Chicago. I went to a Catholic grade school for a while until I got expelled.

Ex2: Expelled?! What did you do? How old were you?

CS: I was about eleven. I got expelled because the nun said that anybody who wasn't Catholic was going to hell. Yeah, they said that in those days. It was before we were all "friends" and "ecumenical" and all that. I raised my hand, not in defiance but rather in innocence and said, "No, that's not so, because my family isn't going to hell." She promptly took me out of the class and sent me home.

I remember walking home with fear and trepidation because school was very important in my life. It was important to my parents that I behave in school and get good grades, and that message had been brought home to me a number of times. I had problems with talking in class and distracting the other kids because I had finished my work. The teacher said the other kids weren't finishing their work. So I helped them, and then we talked. She didn't like that either. I learned sometimes you do what you're told to do, not that it makes sense.

But the doctrine of "we're not going to hell" was too much for the nuns. I just knew I was in deep trouble. Strangely enough, when I got home

Papa looked at me and said, "It was time for you to leave that school anyway." There was a big sigh. That's probably the first time I realized that there is a God and He loves me.

Ex2: What a relief.

CS: Yeah. I was so innocent. I always thought if anything was true, you ought to say that and everybody would be happy. I still believe in saying what's true, but I know it doesn't always make people happy. You have to be careful how you say it.

Ex2: Where did you go after you were expelled?

CS: I went to a public school and then to Hyde Park High School, which at that time was the premiere public high school in Chicago. There were half a dozen black students. The overwhelming majority of the students were Jewish. I did well in high school. As a matter of fact, I was the outstanding senior in my graduating class that year. I went down to have my picture taken at the *Tribune*, where they honored all the outstanding seniors from all the high schools. I was feeling pretty proud!

On my way to the picture taking, a bird pooped on my head. I was devastated. In those days, we had to go through a lot of processes with our hair; some blacks still do. I mean, it was a big deal to get your hair looking like you wanted it to look, and besides, it had cost my mother's scarce dollars to do it. I went up to the *Tribune* in tears. There was a reporter there—a white woman—who knew about black hair. She took me in the washroom, cleaned it up, and got me all put together. It was a pretty nice picture, actually.

Every time I feel as if I have accomplished something and as if I did it by myself, I think of that day. I don't

look up because I don't know if that bird is still lurking up there. I know what it means to be humbled, and I prefer to humble myself. It's interesting to me that this incident sticks with me through all these years. It has meaning. (Chuckling.)

Ex2: The Lord moves in mysterious ways His wonders to perform. So after high school?

CS: I went to nursing school at Michael Reese Hospital School of Nursing. I had applied to two other schools and they had accepted me—offered me scholarships because I was a good student. My teacher, Mrs. Presgill, said, "Oh now, Michael Reese is the best school. You're going there." I said, "But I haven't heard from them." She said, "You will." And I did. I found out later that the problem with my being accepted was that I would have been—and I was—the fourth black student. The quota was three. Mrs. Presgill had connections, so they let a fourth one in—with the expectation that I'd wash out. But that didn't happen. Fortunately, the Lord blessed me with the ability to master the material. If there is a hell, that's what it was like—being that fourth student that wasn't supposed to be there.

Ex2: You began working after nursing school?

CS: After I graduated from nursing school, I got a job working in a hospital. Then I worked in a pediatrician's office—worked for the first black pediatrician in the city of Chicago. A brilliant man, Dr. Edward Beesley, who has long since passed on. I learned a lot.

Ex2: Somewhere in here you got married?

CS: I met my husband and got married on Valentine's Day, 1960, hoping that he'd always remember it. By July

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Life is Good continued from page 7

I was pregnant. In December, I went into labor and delivered premature twin boys who were too young to survive. They weren't expected to make it out of the delivery room, but they lived a couple of days. Today they'd be saved without out any difficulty. That was a sad time. In October 1962, my daughter Ardelia was born, and she was just fine. My only daughter. (Well, the only daughter I gave birth to. I have some other "daughters" by what I call "mutual consent.")

By the beginning of the next year, the marriage had failed. I would always tell people I was widowed. I realized you get an entirely different reaction if you tell them you're a widow. They say, "Oh, what happened?" I say, "His departure was sudden and unexpected." Which it was. But you get all kinds of sympathy. If you say you're divorced, people look at you with a raised eyebrow. Whatever their minds conjure up about divorced women they want to lay on you.

That's also when I learned that women have a hard time without a husband. I basically raised my daughter. She saw her father periodically, and he provided the support that was required by the court. Life went on. That was the start of my angry years. I wasn't going to take it. I learned to fight back, effectively if not kindly. I have repented. I continue to repent for all the harsh words I have inflicted upon people.

Ex2: You went back to work?

CS: I was working when I was pregnant with Ardelia. I believe in working until you can see the whites of the baby's eyes. Then I took off and hadn't planned to go back to work. Necessity prompted, and I had to. The two physicians I worked for were very kind. Grandma and Papa took care of the baby. After about a year, I

decided to go back to school and get a degree so I could work in Public Health. I recall going back after work to give Ardelia her supper before going off to school. She'd cry and wail, and I would leave their house in tears myself. One day I forgot something and I went back. She was dancing and singing and having a great time. That taught me a valuable lesson. Don't think you're essential. Life goes on.

I was blessed to have those wonderful parents who helped me, and I had wonderful friends who also helped me. Life was expensive, but we managed to stay one step ahead of the sheriff. And the Lord provided.

What I did I did because I had to, not because I wanted to. It would have been interesting, if I had had a choice, what I would have done. I admire those women who can afford to and do stay home with their children. I mean, they don't stay home and stare at the kids twenty-four hours. They live active lives. They contribute in many ways. They are creative. They often have some limited paid employment, but they aren't committed to work for their sustenance. I remember when I went back to work at the doctor's office. I was crying. "Oh, I don't want to be away from my baby" One of the doctors looked at me and said, "Well, you gotta feed her." And I said, "Oh," and went on beyond that.

I figure if the Lord wanted me or needed me to be married, I'd be married. I'm not, and life is good. What shocks me is the many women in the church who don't know that—that life is good in whatever state. You take what's dealt to you and you try to make the best hand you can. Have I always understood that? No, but somehow I've been guided in my life to the extent that a person whom I respect and love told me, "the Lord

really micro-manages your life." I guess He doesn't trust me to do it myself. That's fine with me. Life is good.

Ex2: Now you're working in state government?

CS: Yes. After I got my degree, I worked for the local health department and then changed jobs to the Illinois Nurses Association. I was the first black professional to work for any state nurses association. There had been nurses employed at the national organizational level, but the states had none. I mention that because it's a statement about the segregation and discrimination that existed in the workforce at that time. It was absolutely nothing for our society to be proud of.

I went from that job to state government. I'd gone to see the director of the agency. He wanted a public health nurse. He said, "My dear, let me just be candid. I want a public health nurse because I think they're smart. The women are raising hell because we don't have a woman on the staff. The blacks are raising hell because we don't have a black on the staff. You are all three. If you would consider taking this job, I guarantee we'll have fun." Indeed, he kept his word. I learned a lot, *a lot* from him.

I finally settled on health regulation, where my job was to bring a consistent, fair survey inspection of hospitals for the entire state, and we did that. It was a done deal.

Ex2: Tell us how, in the midst of all this, you became a Mormon.

CS: In 1978, I got introduced to the church on an airplane to Hawaii. The pilot told us we should go see the Polynesian cultural center and the temple since we wouldn't have many opportunities to visit the temple in

our life. He told corny jokes the whole way over. After I got to know members of the Church, I knew from those corny jokes that he had to have been a Mormon.

He made an allusion to some powerful change. It was June 10, 1978, when I was on that airplane. When we got to the island, the news was all over the island about the revelation. I didn't know what they were talking about. I shrugged it off. I went to the Polynesian cultural center. I saw the Joseph Smith story and inquired about what they had done with the golden plates. Did not feel I got an answer.

Ex2: What did they tell you?

CS: They never really directly answered. I figured hey, they probably have them hidden away someplace. Keep 'em safe. I did sign that little slip, expecting that I'd get a magazine and a request for a donation. Instead I got these two lovely white boys in their suits and ties who came to my house one evening in the fall. I asked them, "What in the hell are you doing out here this time of night?"

They told me they were elders. And I said, "Yeah, right." But their innocence and the spirit about them was such that I was comfortable to let them in. They were the first to open the predominantly black area where I live. One thing that struck me was how frightened the one from Idaho was. In 1978 and '79, it was very tense between black men and white men, as it continues to be. The tension is always between the men. You overlay that with the young militants, and you have two white boys—too young and too sweet to be cops, but that's what they look like. The thing that saved them is that they were easily identified as ministers. Ministers still move with ease in most communities. Ministers and nurses and EMTs.



Cathy with Linda's two sons, Peter and Chase, in 1990

I call mine a "backdoor conversion." I realized I didn't disbelieve anything.

Ex2: So you were okay with angels coming and all that . . .

CS: Absolutely. Absolutely. I believed in angels. I always wondered why God would leave us without prophets. Somehow it just stopped there? Is that all? Much of what they told me filled in some holes for me.

Ex2: You're a single black woman in the Mormon Church. You don't exactly fit most people's stereotype of a Mormon.

CS: Let's stop for a minute to think about this whole question of "do I fit." Whether or not I fit has never been an issue. That's not a question that I ask myself. The issue is "Do I want to be here?" and how do I help these people "fit" with me? We all fit in the church; we just sometimes have to work with folks to get them to understand how we fit. We belong here in this place together. The Lord has something for us to do with one another—to learn, to serve, and to move ahead in our lives.

I've been in some interesting places in the Church. I've been in many wards here in the States and have felt warmly welcomed. So far, I have never been in an LDS area where I wasn't welcomed. I was in North Carolina with one of my co-workers.

She cautioned me about going to church on Sunday: "It is the South, and that is the Mormon Church . . ." So I go on down to the sacrament meeting, and she says, "Are you sure you want to do this?" And I said, "Hey, if they don't do the right thing, I'll call them to repentance."

I get down there and it's high council Sunday, and here's this black high councilman and I see black couples sitting around the chapel. I had told my friend and her family to pick me up and I'd go to the Methodist church with them—a large congregation, maybe 3,000 people. There was nary another black person in the place. I said, "Hey, what's the deal here? You're telling me not to go to the Mormon Church and I go to yours and I see absolutely nothing dark except me?" I tell them they all need to go down to the Mormon Church and learn how to do this thing.

I go wherever I go in the Church with the expectation that we share a commonality. I'm available to you and you to me based on that commonality. I'm glad to see you, and I'll just be shocked if you're not glad to see me.

Ex2: What is your current calling in the ward.

CS: I work with the young women in the Hyde Park First Ward in the neighborhood of the University of Chicago campus. We have some young women who come whose parents generally do not. My impression is that their parents know this is good for them and, even though they can't see themselves free to live the good life, they want it for their children. So the young women come. I teach the Laurels, but often we all meet together. We have a variety—from very sheltered, protected young ladies to those who have been exposed to more than they should have by this time in their young lives. The

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Life is Good continued from page 9

challenge is to teach a lesson that everyone will understand and that will not alienate any of the girls. And hopefully not embarrass any of the girls. But if you've got to be embarrassed to learn something, so be it. Better to be embarrassed than dumb.

The girls are eager to learn. Our Young Women leaders are generally women with family history in the Church. They bring a quality to our young women that is hard to describe—a quality of purity. They come with an enthusiasm for wanting to help these girls. Most are anguished that they don't know how, but I believe that their interacting with the girls blesses the girls' lives because the leaders are examples to them; their example says "You can have this life." It happens; it works. And they have marvelous talents.

Ex2: The leaders?

CS: Yes, the leaders. The girls have undiscovered talents, undiscovered to themselves, but we're working on that.

Ex2: What challenges do you face in your work with the youth?

CS: Sometimes we want so much to hold onto the kids that we don't correct them. I am reminded of an uncle who taught Bible class who recently died. At his funeral, a woman got up and said that in his class you had to pronounce every word correctly, to enunciate it, to speak it clearly in standard English. Those people my uncle had taught were no different than these kids. It's how you correct them.

Grandmothers enjoy a special place in the community. I can get away with some things with the young men that adult men would be afraid to say because I'm a grandmother. And when I say, "Son, take that do-rag off your head and sit down," they do

that, and there's no contention with me. It's always hardest making sure these young women understand what it is you're talking about. I'll tell them I don't believe there's any girl around who comes to church who wants to get pregnant out of wedlock. So what happens? Why do they get pregnant? Because they don't know how it works. I don't mean the biological function. They don't know how they get into that situation. It's not something where you say, "I wanna have sex." No, that's not it at all. It starts with the touching. You need to take the behaviors and hold them up against what you say you believe. When you've been raised to accommodate and be kind and serve, sometimes that's incorrectly interpreted as doing whatever is asked of you. It's when it comes to the male/female situation that this gets you into trouble. You have to understand that you have the right to say no. That's called free agency. It's even hard for adults. It's hard for the other person to hear "No." In these situations, you have the right and the obligation to say "No."

This is the other thing—if our kids can't read, how are they going to study the scriptures, how are they going to study the Gospel, where are they going to go in life? We need to build confidence, help them with their deficits, rejoice when they have an accomplishment—but to pretend that illiteracy doesn't exist? How can we bring these children unto Christ when they're locked in a detention camp without walls? That's what being illiterate is. Here we sit in this Church with all these literacy resources and we're gonna keep these kids in our midst three, four, five—however many years—and not teach 'em to read? I mean, what are we going to say to the Savior?

Ex2: Can you share what you love about the Gospel or life in the Church?

CS: I love that if I have something worthwhile to do and I need help, my fellow saints are going to help me. I don't have to persuade them. I don't have to get a big stick. They come willingly to work together for a good cause. I love that we extend ourselves.

I love the emphasis on prayer and scripture and personal revelation. I love standing for something—to borrow a phrase. I love the people of the Church, even the ones who are a little grouchy, cause then I'm determined I'm going to bring 'em around.

I love even the hard parts about the Church. The Church is an environment that's obligated to love me. Y'all are supposed to help me do this. Sometimes there's that person that grates on my last nerve, and I want to stay away from her. But I don't know what's in her heart. If I say a prayer of gratitude for that person and I try and look at her in her life, it gets better. I find that I'm probably grating her as much as she's grating me. This call to love one another is the task.

I love that the programs are directed toward helping you live a righteous life if that's what you want to do.

I love the way the Church reaches out to the world. Good works are done privately, and our Father in Heaven rewards openly. Indeed, He has rewarded us as a community of saints, as individuals. The fact that we *know* God loves us is such a blessing. There are people who don't know that.

Are there things in the Church we need to work on? Yeah, yeah. The Church is the environment where we're supposed to work with each other and for each other and help each other come unto Christ. That's what it's all about—coming unto Christ. ✱

First Recital

You are second
after the boutonniere boy
whose *Twinkle* comes out
shining.

Sparkle lip gloss glistens from a mouth
poised to the eighth-sized violin,
guests lean forward on seats
anticipate Orion beaming tonight.

Your dark moon eyes stare, shocked
—worse than spiders at night—
six-year-old cheek cupped to
instrument you have explained

has back, belly, bridge.
In this chapel, melody is mischievous,
pops from his seat,
squeaks the bow sharp, yanks

a tie crooked, makes
your pitchy gaze float
in the murky universe of beginners
—Just keep going.

You behold the masses,
the breathing bodies of
one hundred mothers who bless you
with memory, for fingers

to return home *from the world so high*.
After, you cry at my lap
for seventeen more pieces, tears staccato,
fail to hear Their notes spring forth

—wrong—from Bach and Corelli—
as many as stars in the sky.
In spite of it all, sprout of a violinist,
as a mother knows her cubs

you gather me to the strings, four to a pride,
fingers stretch, a lioness from slumber,
as she sniffs first light, stars twinkle
how I wonder what you are.

Reporter

From its green box along the road,
the Saturday morning paper awaits.
At the kitchen island a new governor
has frozen funds, and babies have
been born named Canon and Abby.
Mr. Bob Woodward of the *Washington Post*
peers over my shoulder, looks for
his story, nowhere in this
small-town paper, circulation 25,000, no
Watergate or Vietnam in this place where
Woodward is a figment of one's imagination,
a glowering visitor of last night's dream
who reminds me
there is serious reporting, and I am so far.

I would be a war correspondent, know that,
if it weren't for a husband, the four children
who live in my house, in the
heart with its windows and red roof,
the front door from which we march daily to
school, swim practice, church and
back, the gate to our city where
music advances from the living room in winter
and spring's garden glistens lettuce green.
These bellies do not know
the churn of night to morning—food a thousand miles
away—of rifled and ready boys,
street fury five hundred years,
and executed bombing, the lateral slit of throat.

At our gate I watch those who enter
and exit, take the
children on excursion
to museums and so forth,
stand at the border
of paintings, spotlights
illuminating, point
to a soldier on horse,
an Indian struck in the back
—how the painter captured him mid-air—
or the limp body of Jesus, the
shades of slaughter, the form of it all,
report to them
in museum whispers,
world events.

Poems by Deborah Moreno

Gender Moments

by Susan Sessions Rugh

Act I: Midwest Pilgrims, Rockford, Illinois, April 10–12

Theme: "Curious Woman Syndrome"

I had not attended a Midwest Pilgrims retreat since moving from the Midwest to Utah in 1997, but I was drawn to this one by a chance to attend with my sister (who lives in the Chicago suburbs) and to see old friends. It was a huge pleasure to greet those I had not seen since then, and I had many good, long talks and walks with my sister and with long-lost friends from Chicago days.

I had been one of the founders of the group twenty years before. Back then, I had three young children, a husband in graduate school, and no idea of what I wanted to do with my life beyond mothering my three young sons. This time, I was a tenured faculty member, a published author, and a nearly empty nester. I was in a different place, and I was most interested in the younger women, who seemed much more accomplished and confident than I had been at age thirty.

About fifty curious women made their way to the retreat center — friends, mothers, daughters, daughters-in-law. The retreat followed the customary Midwest Pilgrims format: a get-acquainted session Friday night, where you could say anything without fear of judgment, after which women huddled in folding chair groups to catch up. The next day featured our guest speaker, Marie Cornwall, speaking on gender theory and how to apply it, a discussion enlivened by healthy disagreements on problems and solutions. We all chuckled at her explanation of

"gender moments" (like men trying to cook on Thanksgiving) and immediately got it. Small group sessions were held on various topics, from female-to-female aggression to female blessings. That night was a retrospective on the Midwest Pilgrims in a clever skit by the group's staunchest veterans. The munching of M&Ms and drinking of Diet Coke went on until long past midnight. Sunday morning was a time for worship and then gratitude as women spoke frankly of the hard places in their lives and what the retreat had meant to them. Then we jumped in our cars bound for airports or long drives home across the prairie.

Lowlight: Monastic bathrooms

Highlight: Sunday morning choir performance

Freebies: Copies of Exponent II

Bottom line: Free talk, free time, friendship, no consensus

Act II: BYU Women's Conference, May 1–2, Provo, Utah

Theme: "Come Unto Christ," Omni 1:26

I had never seriously attended a BYU Women's Conference, but since a colleague had asked me to be on the program, I decided to really go for it. If you haven't attended, you can only imagine the deluge of 20,000 plus women on campus, all looking for parking or a restroom or a building they can't find. It is managed chaos. The attendance figures show a pretty serious interest in gathering with other Mormon women.

As I fell in step with strangers or chatted as we worked together on humanitarian projects, I learned that the women were enthusiastic and needy. Many had come from far away just to be with other LDS women. We

all struggled to read the complicated schedule of simultaneous sessions. Bottled water and Bookstore fudge were bestsellers.

In addition to hearing talks about reading the scriptures or building a better marriage, I listened to professionals on cutting edge topics, such as addiction to pornography or dealing with aging parents. As I anticipated my own presentation, an authority not by training but by life's experiences, I felt intimidated. I hoped what I had planned would be worth their trip. I had prayed for guidance and had even given up my occasional swearing. I had researched my assigned topic — preparing sons for sacred service and helping daughters understand their partnership with the priesthood — in the scriptures, the doctrinal canon, and in conference talks. I inserted personal experiences so my talk would be specific and down-to-earth. The talk went well. My cheering section was enthusiastic, but best was the response from anonymous women who came up to tell me it was just what they needed.

I joined the throngs in the Marriott Center for the final session, an extravaganza of sincere sisterhood, singing and laughing and crying. I sat between well-heeled matrons from Salt Lake City and islander immigrants from California who had made great sacrifices to come. I marveled at the diversity, the strength of numbers, the aching for a shared sisterly experience.

Lowlight: Long lines for popular sessions, some "sold out"

Highlight: Getting my talk over with
Freebies: Fridge magnets advertising Women's Conference

Bottom line: Scripted, spiritually-focused, global

Act III: Camp Mia Shalom, Utah, June 17-21

Theme: "A Perfect Brightness of Hope,"
2 Nephi 31:20

Even though I was the ward camp leader, this was my first ever girl's camp, and I barely knew what I was doing. I relied a lot on the YW president, my college-aged assistant leader, and the five youth leaders. We arrived early and took over the four cabins assigned to our ward. Youth leaders decorated our cabins and camp with stars (our symbol of "brightness"). We lugged out the two camp stoves, large plastic bins of food, half a dozen huge coolers, and set up tables and a canopy. When the thirty-two girls arrived on the stake buses, they claimed space in the cabins. Some feelings were hurt, but eventually all found a place to sleep.

The days were filled with a "Morning-side" routine: craft, outdoor activity (hiking or canoeing), craft, scripture study, craft, fireside, which were interspersed with meals and tending the camp fire. At night, we served cup after cup of hot cocoa (it was chilly and rainy). Instead of mastering outdoor skills as is done at Boy Scout Camp, the emphasis is on developing spiritual skills in the outdoors. We decorate anything and everything to keep the themes in mind.

The first day I had a headache from worrying about what everyone had promised me would be a very tough experience. By the second day, I guiltily realized I was enjoying it. My job seemed to be to remind youth leaders of the day's schedule and to rule on requests to trade cabins or sleep outside or hike up the mountain in the middle of the night. I steadfastly avoided much involvement in cooking and spent much of my time just watching and chatting with the girls. I enthusiastically slept with the Beehives for the first two nights, but I

retreated to the leaders' cabin for the last two (where we had hidden the contraband Diet Coke in coolers). Thank heavens for Tylenol PM.

The girls loved the crafts. I had really pooh-poohed the whole crafts scene at camp, but I soon realized that it kept them very busy, very productive. We made macramé bracelets and necklaces. We made sachets of dried flowers. We made padded and beribboned memo boards. We made suede headbands. And the last day, we spent several hours shampooing hair, plucking eyebrows, and polishing nails. I had hoped it to be an exercise in good grooming rather than beauty, but in the end it was an exercise in doing something nice to make somebody else feel better. The campfire testimony meeting capped off the whole experience, tears and all.

Lowlight: Long walks to the biffy in the middle of the night
Highlight: Seeing "marginal" girls befriended
Freebies: Long-sleeved Camp Shalom T-shirt, orange bandana
Bottom line: Keep them busy, keep them spiritual, keep them safe

Epilogue:
The first two gatherings were ones of self-selected women. Midwest Pilgrims were askers of questions and, for the most part, committed to the Church. Women's conference attendees shared a common belief in the gospel, but little else seemed to unite them. The retreat was mostly discussion, with lots of time for women to express their opinions. Women's Conference was too big to hear from everybody, so it was a time to listen to experts and process later. Girls Camp, not entirely a self-selected group, was at a primer level: Teach them the scriptures and the principles and give them a chance to do good to each other.



Susan at the April 2003 Midwest Pilgrims Retreat

If we overlook the differences, we notice the similarities. It seems—whatever their inclination or age—women want to gather with women. I wonder why we women feel more comfortable in a gender-segregated setting. Maybe it's like attending a women's college—you get some airtime. Maybe married women are tired of being identified solely as part of a pair or as a partner of a man. Maybe single women likewise want to be considered as whole, not half-less. Maybe biology really is destiny. Maybe our gender differences trump the other categories of identity that we inhabit. I wonder if it is because we are American, or because we are Mormon, or because we are human, that gender is our paramount identity.

Or maybe, we just like an excuse to get away to drink diet Coke and eat chocolate. Let's see—is that a "gender moment"? *

My Daddy's Hands

by Becky Reid Linford

"DAAADD!! WAAATCCHH!! Dad!!
Hey, Dad!!! DAAAAADDD! Watch me!"

The middle-aged man with a tummy, thinning dark hair slicked back, ugly-ish plaid swim trunks, and lots of little moles on his tanned skin looked up at me from his nylon-weave patio chair beside the neighborhood pool. He had a pleasant, calm smile on his face as he put down his copy of *The Washington Post* and waved at me as I wound up my chunky eight-year-old frame and went flying into the pool. No beautiful swan dive—just a hurling mass of hysterical grinning flesh. I had no idea how badly I was embarrassing myself; I just wanted to show off for Dad. My brother and I would wait to go to the pool 'til Dad got home from "the Department" (of Agriculture) on those sweaty, humid Washington evenings. The poor man just wanted to rest a bit, read his paper, and then dive in and do his "signature stroke," a walrus-like back-float thing back and forth across the width of the pool.

"Oh, uh, Becky, could you come here and help me?" Oh, no, Dad's pointing his index finger at me, asking me to "help" him, which means I get to stand beside him indefinitely, holding a screwdriver or a wrench. I learned at a very young age—as did all my siblings—that helping Dad actually meant holding something. It was usually excruciatingly boring, especially when you thought you were going to do something cool and useful, like put together the car's engine that Dad had taken apart or build a house. He actually did those things—rebuilt cars and built houses and came up with ingenious ways of fixing things. The dream house he built for his family in suburban Washington, D.C., in the '50s was based on plans drawn up by

a student of Frank Lloyd Wright and had a foundation of concrete and steel girders. The house not only still stands, but neighbors are instructed to run there in case of a nuclear holocaust—the first architecturally and aesthetically sound bomb shelter.

One of my earliest memories is the feeling of pride I had in my dad because he was smart and strong and had a good job and could fix anything. He was an intellectual and a political scientist and a bureaucrat. He was not poetic nor a romantic, but he could get the most horrific knots out of my delicate gold chain necklace or my shoelaces despite those massive hands. He loved playing catch with his boys and talking about current events at the dinner table with all of us. He didn't enjoy the ballet or symphonies or opera, but he came if his kids were performing and always smiled kindly and patted us on the shoulder reassuringly afterwards.

The Not-So-Great Depression

Dad was a product of the Depression. He learned from his almost fanatical mother thrift for thrift's sake. He feared the next "Big Bang" of the stock market and hoarded everything: newspapers, *Popular Mechanics* and *Scientific American* magazines, cardboard, shoeboxes, license plates, bottles for his innumerable collections of bolts, screws, nails, nuts, bicycles, car tires, car batteries, car everything. He used to wash out aluminum foil and baggies along with plastic plates and utensils and stash them all over the house in North Logan "just in case." In our catch-all drawer under the oven, we had packets of ketchup and taco sauce dating back to the Kennedy administration. Dad's dream for me as a little girl in the '60s was to learn to type and take dictation so that I could always find a job as a secretary.

A Boy and His Car(s)

Dad first learned to drive when he was six years old. Grandma used to love to tell how Dad had to stand up in order to see over the steering wheel of their Model T. Grandpa was an electrician and was frequently away from home and so depended on his firstborn Max to take care of the growing family. Grandma had to go to Salt Lake City when Dad was just ten years old, so he got to drive all the way from Logan on unpaved mountain roads, frequently hopping out to move away fallen boulders and trees and to change the tires.

Dad loved cars. He loved figuring out how the engine worked, how the gears shifted, how the brakes functioned, the smell of the oil and the gasoline, and the solid feel of metal. I used to hate it when he asked me to come outside and learn how to do something on the car like grease the "nipples," change a flat, or change the oil. I didn't realize how much I wounded him when I rolled my eyes in teen disgust.

The Salmon Returning Home

Dad loved to drive. We got to drive every summer from Virginia to Utah and back. ("Why fork over big bucks for airfare when you can drive there yourself?!") That comes to at least six days in the car every year, which is when we got to witness Dad's semi-annual explosions. Imagine, if you can, packing everything the family could possibly need for two weeks—clothes, sandwiches, blankets, pillows, games, spare tires, jacks, tools, jumper cables, first aid kits, Thermos—into a succession of beloved cars: the Packard, the blue '58 Chevy station wagon, the '62 Oldsmobile sedan with Dad's own springs under the back seat to serve as "shock absorbers."

Day One of *Destination: Utah* was usually spent eating Mom's homemade sandwiches and drinking lukewarm water from the Thermos. We had to "hold it" until we stopped for gas. NO EXCEPTIONS. Mom was usually in a great mood, happy to be going back to her beloved Vernal, and Dad seemed pleasant enough. Day Two was marked by tension as we would attempt to bypass Chicago and make it to somewhere in the middle of Kansas or Nebraska. By Day Three, my brother and I, who usually fought the first two days, had made peace with each other and simply sat back and enjoyed the fireworks going on in the front seat between the folks.

"You missed Alternate Route 40. We need to take it because of the construction. Maaaaaaaaaaxxx, LISTEN! We need to turn around now!"

The veins on Dad's head and neck would pulsate; he'd grip the steering wheel so hard it looked like it might turn to liquid under the pressure. He'd glower, looking straight ahead. His lips would purse in and out, his brown eyes shooting flames out of his head and his scowl making one long, black, bushy eyebrow across his forehead. He would pull the car over to the next gas station and angrily yank the map away from Mom to see for himself exactly what was happening. It was part fear, part thrill, part excitement to see him stand up to Mom. After waiting for what seemed like hours, Dad would whip the car around and head back the way we'd just come, looking for the detour sign to get us back on the right road.

We'd pull into Vernal sometime in the middle of the night, groggy, hungry, with that slimy been-in-the-car-three-days feeling, sandwich crumbs and unidentified goo falling out of our clothes. It wasn't pretty, but we'd made it! Dad made this marathon drive every year from 1940 until 1971. That fact alone explains a lot.

The Way to a Man's Heart

We would come home from Utah with boxes of carefully packed bottles of vegetables and fruits Grandma Reid had canned. Dad especially loved bottled raspberries, green beans ("Eat your legumes, Becky!"), peaches, and mustard pickles. He loved my mother's cooking, especially the Sunday brunch we ate between Sunday School and Sacrament meeting, when she made hotcakes or waffles from her own secret recipe with sausage and bacon and eggs. We'd eat ourselves sick and then, while the rest of us slept, Dad sat at his spot on the couch and read every section of the *Sunday Post* and watched *Meet the Press*. In summer, Dad took us to Gifford's ice cream parlor for cones, then back home where we'd sit down to yet another incredible meal of meat (steak, pot roast, gravy) and potatoes (mashed, baked, or roasted), onions, carrots, and always green beans. No wonder we're all fat. None of that fru-fru foreign food; it was American food Dad wanted and it's what he got!

Dad's great food love was peanuts—in any form, including in Snickers, Baby Ruths, and peanut brittle. Dad developed a weird ritualistic tic when he ate peanuts. He'd hold the newspaper with his left hand, get a heaping handful of peanuts in his right hand, and then juggle them around and around in a circle, raising his eyebrows ever higher during the gradual approach to his mouth until finally he launched the little suckers in and chomped away. He could do that for upwards of an hour. It was amazing to watch; I felt like Margaret Mead trying to identify some kind of anthropological deviant.

American Justice

Dad's younger brothers loved to tease him because he didn't know how to take it. He was protective of his little

sisters, especially Gladys, who, when five years old, fell down at the playground and broke her nose. Only nine years old at the time, Max picked up the crying, bloody child and carried her over a mile all the way home.

Dad wasn't afraid to express his opinion about what was right and fair or what he deemed unfair or unjust. This forthrightness could be over big issues such as war or small issues such as North Logan town council meetings. He hated Lyndon Johnson for escalating the war in Viet Nam, and he despised Richard Nixon for a variety of reasons, most of them centered on Watergate. He called Ronald Reagan "el Dumb-o" and almost ran over—literally—Jesse Jackson, who was lying down in the parking garage of the Department of Agriculture in 1968, demanding that the USDA cafeteria provide lunch for the protesting Black Panthers.

Dad was inactive for many years because of what he perceived as hypocrisy on the part of church officials during the Depression. He thought the Utah high school I attended had no business holding prayers before assemblies, and he couldn't understand how the North Logan stake church leaders tried to rule the little town as a theocracy.

At one of the darkest times of my life, I was unfairly blamed and scapegoated by these same stake leaders for a series of horrific events involving myself and my boyfriend. Dad helped me through this time by praying with me, holding me when I cried, and then grabbing my shoulders, looking me in the eyes and telling me: "These damned Elmer Gantrys do NOT speak for Jesus! Jesus would never treat you this way! Don't you ever forget that, missy! Jesus would never have handled this mess in this way!"

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My Daddy's Hands continued from page 15

Like Paws of a Bear for His Hands

When I was twenty years old, I had my tonsils removed at the LDS hospital in Salt Lake City in an attempt to decrease the number of sinus infections and episodes of tonsillitis and bronchitis I was experiencing. Five days after the surgery, I attended my former boyfriend's farewell in North Logan. The day was emotional and bad enough when I realized there in the chapel that I could taste blood and became immediately concerned that something was wrong. My parents and I dashed home, and my mother called the ear, nose, and throat specialist at his home. He met us in the Logan Hospital emergency room. I was still wearing my Sunday go-to-meetin' clothes, with blood all over the front of the beautiful dress I'd worn just for my old boyfriend.

It seemed that the sutures from the tonsillectomy had ripped open and that I'd have to have them sewn back up right there and then. The doctor said I'd already lost too much blood, that there was not enough time to use any anesthesia, and that he'd have to sew me back up without any pain medication. I was on a vocal scholarship at Utah State University at the time, and I could hear my mother frantically screaming from the other room to "Watch out for her vocal cords! She sings opera!" I somehow gurgled out to Dad, "Keep her out there away from me." I then asked if my dad could be with me so I could hold onto his hands. I thought if it'd worked for Joseph Smith, it should work for me, too.

I had to lie very still on the table while the doctor stitched up first one side and then the other. I remember looking up at the ceiling and sinking my fingernails into Dad's huge hands, which were lying across my stomach.

I kept choking on the blood as it went down the back of my throat. It felt like I was drowning in my own blood. I had to keep telling myself not to freak out, just to hold on to Dad's hands and squeeze them when I was really scared. He held on tight and squeezed back to let me know he was there.

The thing seemed to go on forever, as if in slow motion. When finally, finally it was over, I opened my eyes and looked at Dad and then realized how awful it must have been for him. His face was covered in sweat, his shirt was soaking wet, his eyes had a terrible look of panic in them, and his poor hands were practically bloody from where I'd sunk my fingernails into his flesh. I think he almost passed



Stephanie Gordon

out as soon as it was all over, but he held it together and took us all home later that evening.

That experience taught me so many lessons on many levels. It's not hard for me to imagine a loving Heavenly Father who never leaves you. He might not be able to protect you from bad things, he might not even be able to give you anesthesia to lessen the pain, but He's always there with you, holding your hand and suffering along with you. I learned that my non-verbal, non-mushy, non-romantic dad loved me enough to stay with me when he didn't really want to be there, and the knowledge of his love was enough to get me through literally anything.

Strokes Really Suck

In 1993, Dad had his first big stroke. It was massive, and unfortunately he didn't receive the proper "stroke-busting" drugs at the hospital as soon as he should have. Afterwards, Dad underwent a kind of personality change. He didn't have the outwardly debilitating effects, such as paralysis or inability to communicate. He knew who he was and who we all were; he still had a grasp of world and current events and of his own surroundings; he could still read and walk and understand things—he just couldn't get the words out quickly, if at all. He and Mom moved to a nice townhouse in Holladay, just minutes away from my sister Jan, the Angel of Mercy and an R.N. Dad's walk became a shuffle, and his days became consumed with crushing countless pills into Diet Coke or cranberry juice and drinking that swill throughout the day.

He particularly wanted me to finish my dissertation. Every time I spoke with him, he asked incisive questions about my research and about my analysis with enough detail that I knew he'd actually read my rough drafts. Last fall during our annual Utah visit, I sat down next to Dad on his comfy loveseat in their living room. He looked over at me with his drooping smile, patted my hand, nodded at my dissertation draft on the coffee table with his penciled-in suggestions and questions in the margins, and smiled back at me as if to say, "Go on, dear; this is good. You can do it." I knew exactly what he was trying to say, and I took the glorious opportunity to take his big old left hand in mine, and I held it up to my cheek. Then we just sat there together on his loveseat and watched CNN—just the two of us—for probably an hour. Didn't say anything. Just holding those gorgeous hands.

The phone rings at 8:30 A.M. the day after New Year's. It's my sister Jan. "Beck, Daddy had a stroke this morning." Pause. I'm starting to feel sick to my stomach. My mind is swirling. "Oh, Jannie, is he going to die? Is it that bad a stroke?" "Oh, Beck, I don't know." She starts to cry. I do, too.

My siblings and I—one brother in England, another in Minnesota, my sister in Utah, and me in Virginia—start a series of conference calls to try to figure out what we should do. We all give our feelings and thoughts, we rely on Jan for medical opinions and options, we try to play the wait-and-see game of questions: "Well, do you think he's going to die kind of soon? Is he in pain? When should we come? Can he communicate?" I'd been panicked about flying because of 9/11. Now all I can think of is how to get out there as soon as possible.

My sister picks me up from the airport, and we go to the hospital. He can't speak but he knows me, and I cover him with kisses and gentle hugs. I smile and speak slowly and clearly to him, trying to sound like everything's as it should be. He's lost a lot of weight, and there are bruises and a deep gash where his head hit the kitchen counter.

I'm the luckiest daughter in the world because I got to say everything I needed to say to my dad, both for him and for myself. I got to see the look of relief and peace come over him when I told him we'd always take care of Mom. I saw the pride in his eyes and a tiny smile on the right side of his face when I told him my defense date was set. I told him that my kids were doing great, that my husband was getting control of his diabetes, that we were financially solvent. I told him what wonderful mothers his granddaughters were. Most important of all, I told him what a wonderful dad he

was. I stroked his forehead and put chapstick on his cracked lips and gave him ice chips and cold water on a sponge stick, which he seemed to relish.

I tried to be upbeat whenever I was with him, to keep it together until I could get out of his room and fall apart. I didn't know I'd take it this hard. Malcolm arrived two days later. Mal seemed to know what to say to Dad. He was so sweet and loving and tender with him. He read the words to "O My Father" to Dad and talked about the plan of salvation. Dad has always wanted to believe, but I think he's always been afraid that it's just not true. Malcolm is invaluable because he truly believes the things he's telling Dad, and you can't fake that kind of belief.

Dad's last surviving sibling comes often to see him, his beloved Gladys. He has loved and protected her her whole life. It is so sad to see her say goodbye to her first and last brother.

I'm so mad at death—to take my dad away in bits and pieces like this, slowly, over ten years of strokes, of falls, of confusion. I'm so mad, so sad. But also so grateful to be with my dad these last days of his life.

Five o'clock Saturday morning, Malcolm wakes me up. "Becky, Dad died a half hour ago. We need to go see him before they take him to the mortuary." He's only been gone forty-five minutes when we enter his room. He looks horrible. The oxygen tubing left a deep impression on his cheek. His mouth was open in a horrible, distorted fashion—much like *The Scream*. "He's SO not here anymore." I sound like a Valley Girl. I touch his forehead lightly. His skin is already so cold! I come totally unglued. Malcolm and Jan and I all kiss him goodbye, and Malcolm says another gorgeous prayer. I had no idea my siblings were so profound, so wonderful.

Knotty Pine

Dad built his first dream house in 1949 with the help of two of his brothers and a local contractor. Their starter home, it had beautiful knotty pine paneling in the living and dining areas.

Dad's attended more than his share of funerals and used to rage at the huge expense of coffins: "I'm going to build a sturdy box out of pine, and when I die, I want you to put me in there and bury me in that box!" Fortunately, he didn't follow through on that threat, but as we sat in the funeral home looking through the catalog of coffins together, we all burst out laughing when we came upon the 8x10 glossy photo of the knotty pine casket! We all knew that instant that this was Dad's coffin! It was pine, not some crummy low-quality junk, but a perfectly respectable and appropriate hand-crafted knotty pine coffin.

Everyone who wanted to was invited to come say goodbye to Dad and perhaps leave something with him in the coffin. Kirk laid the front page of *The Washington Post* from the day Dad died on his chest. Malcolm's kids put in some small tools. My son Mike put a computer CD in there. I put in his brown leather driving cap from Italy. Friends and family from Logan came to the graveside. Afterwards, some of us went across the street and had an Aggie ice cream cone in Dad's honor. He liked the butter pecan the best.

Like I said, it isn't hard for me to imagine a Father in Heaven who loves unconditionally, who stays by my side when I most need him, who's strong and smart and kind and can fix anything, who holds my hand and gives me strength. But missing my dad hurts like hell. And I, like Dad, hope that this whole thing is true, so that maybe someday I can hold his big old hands in mine again and see his love for me in his eyes. ✱

The Quest of A Curious Woman

Sacrament meeting talk given at the April 2003 Midwest Pilgrims Retreat

by Heather S. Cannon

My father used to tell a story about me that always irritated me. We were driving home and it was getting dark and I asked, “Daddy, why does it get dark at night?” His response was, “When we get home, you get a flashlight, a tennis ball, and the globe and I’ll explain it to you.” As we got closer to home, I said, “Daddy, it gets dark at night so we can sleep, doesn’t it? So I don’t need to get the tennis ball and flashlight and globe, do I?” He told this story as an example of my intellectual laziness and how I avoided his attempt to educate me.

I have to admit there may have been an element of intellectual laziness involved in my desire to avoid a lesson on the solar system. However, I had asked *why* it got dark at night, not *how* it got dark. My answer “So we can sleep” suggests the idea that some organizing intelligence created the world. My father was an atheist. My answer of night being created to fill a human need made no intellectual sense to him, and that’s the only kind of sense that existed in his world.

I’ve always been much more curious about the cosmic “whys” than the more mundane “hows.” I think that’s partly because I am what I categorize as an inductive thinker. My theory is that there are two kinds of people in the world: those who create sense out of the world by building their understanding from the ground up—who first learn all the facts and then put them together to make the whole picture—and those, like me, for whom the facts make no sense unless they have a framework to hang them on. Once I have the framework, I can handle learning all the facts that compose it. How this applies in life is that I always did horribly on weekly

quizzes and aced the finals. It also means that I have a tendency to read the first third of a book, skip to the ending, and then go back to fill in the middle once I have a sense of where it’s all going. On a spiritual level, this translates to a much greater interest in the Gospel plan than in Church structure and hierarchy. Perhaps that’s why I am comfortable being a questioning woman in the Church. In fact, the only reason I am comfortable in the Church is because of questioning women.

My conversion was rather atypical. I married an inactive Church member who is a perfectionist. With regard to the Church, that means that he didn’t believe in Christmas and Easter church going; you either went all the time or not at all. The not-at-all approach worked until our second child, Mason, died of SIDS when he was two months old.

Before going to bed, I checked on the baby as I always did, and he was still and cold. After attempts at his revival, we called the police, and Rowland went off to the hospital with them. While I waited at home with my toddler, Hilary, hoping for a miracle but knowing that, in fact, my child was beyond the point of miracles, the lines of Wordsworth’s poem kept going through my mind—the ones referring to a child as the father of man “who comes trailing clouds of glory from God who is his home.” I can never remember the exact lines—and perhaps that’s better because I didn’t remember the exact lines at the time—but the words were so very present. I tried to find the source the next morning but wasn’t able to. Yet the lines stayed with me.

There was never a question about where the funeral would be held. My

husband called the bishop of our Cambridge Ward, who was no longer bishop and referred him to the new bishop, and they arranged the funeral. The talks—given by people I’d never met—were about the plan of salvation from the pre-existence through death and the resurrection. I was stunned. I had never been taught about a pre-existence in my minimal church experience. I immediately responded to the gospel plan. It clearly confirmed those lines of poetry that had been running through my head. I had found a framework on which I could hang my understanding of life.

And then there was the church. First, there were the missionaries. They asked lots of questions. Rhetorical questions. “You believe this, right? So then this other thing must be true, right?” “No, I don’t know that I believe in Christ,” I would say. “Oh,” they replied, shaken, “but . . . how can you not?” They were as relieved as I was when I suspended lessons after Ethan’s birth nine months later and never picked them up again.

But I continued to attend church and eventually taught the Sunbeams. I also participated in a women’s study group that was studying women in early Utah to present at an Institute class. This was an environment I was comfortable in—studying, questioning. Rowland’s aunt, hearing of my interest in early Mormon women’s history, gave me a copy of Emily Dow Partridge’s diary, which was only available within the family at that time. In her diary, Emily talked of her unhappy marriage to Brigham Young. They really didn’t like each other even though they produced eight children together. But despite her anger at him and unhappiness with him, Emily never doubted that he was a prophet of God. That meant a lot to me. It

allowed me not to feel I had to be 100% fine with everything to participate in the church. Four years after the funeral where I first heard of the plan of salvation, I was baptized. I still had a lot of questions about the Church, but so did all my friends. If they could be members and have questions, why couldn't I?

That was nearly thirty years ago, and here I am—still full of questions, still attending church. A few months after I was baptized, the women's group had a retreat outside Boston, where we talked about the wonderful women's newspaper we'd found in the Harvard archives called the *Woman's Exponent* and wondered if we could re-create such a voice for women in the Church. A year later, we published the first issue of *Exponent II*.

It is now many years and many retreats later. My children all have children. *Exponent II* is having its aches and pains as do so many of us who were there at the start. Some of the questions have changed; some are still the same.

Twenty years ago when I came to the first Midwest Pilgrims retreat, I had just moved back to the Chicago area after living twenty years in Boston. I had left Chicago to make my place in the "wide, wide world"—or at least in college in Boston. I returned to Chicago twenty years later with a nice list of accomplishments—college degree; MBA; founding mother of *Exponent II*; contributor to the book *Mormon Women*; and treasurer of Emmeline Press. I had three children whom I was raising on my own now.

Ten years later, I again left Chicago in pursuit of greater opportunities—this time on my own since my children had all left the nest. I had more places to go and things to accomplish. I climbed the career ladder and added a few titles to my resume. And then my



Heather with daughter Hilary and daughter-in-law Judy (with Mason) at the April 2003 Midwest Pilgrims Retreat

career stalled. I was laid off. Since my identity was pretty well tied to my career, this was tough. I started my own business, and then 9/11 hit. Over the course of eighteen months, I traveled the U. S., interviewing for jobs and always coming in second. After last year's Midwest Pilgrims retreat, I began feeling I needed to return to Chicago. I missed the Lake and family and the North Shore ward. Eight months ago, I decided to return to Chicago without a job on the assumption that if I did so, the job would come. I now live in the city I grew up in, across the street from the YMCA where I spent several days a week from junior high through high school.

In many ways, my life has come full cycle, and I am back where I started. But I am not the same. I have come to realize that there's more to life than achievements; it's really relationships that matter. I always valued relationships but felt guilty about "wasting" my time on them. My parents referred to friendships as "messing around."

Relationships are funny things—some you choose and some you don't. We don't consciously choose our families. For some of us, our parents are a major challenge in our lives. My parents were a challenge. More specifically, my mother was a very difficult mother. But with all the negative issues my parents left me with, they also are due much of the credit for my being a curious woman. My mother died at age seventy-two coming home from a French lesson. After he retired

at age sixty, my father first bought an orchard, which he ran for a while, and then became involved in community theater. A few months before he died, he built a greenhouse so he could become a more professional horticulturist. Parents give us issues to deal with but also some of our greatest strengths. The issues in our families often help us define what we want to be—sometimes in rebellion against our families, not emulation.

We may choose spouses, for better or worse, and some of us choose to let go of those spouses when the worse is much worse than anticipated. We may choose to have children, and then we are faced with the raising of those children, who come with their own issues. We learn from them and from the issues they raise for us.

We choose our friends. I chose to become part of the women's study group in Boston and to be involved in *Exponent II*. I've chosen to attend many Midwest Pilgrim retreats and make friendships there.

We choose whether or not to participate in the Church, but we don't choose all the relationships that result from that. I had a work friend in Pennsylvania who joined a community organization so that she could interact with people who were different from her. The Church has always provided opportunities to interact with people who are different from me. I've had the opportunity to know a Pulitzer Prize winner and a woman who just could not learn to read. I've been friends with women who've never married and with one woman who eventually had eighteen children. I love the diversity I find in the church. I have worked for years in corporate America, where everyone is young and smart and beautiful and affluent. I know a much wider range of people in the church. I love

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I Corinthians 12, where Paul talks about the church as a body:

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many are one body; so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free . . . For the body is not one member, but many.

I've been recently attuned to members of the body. Turns out we sometimes do cast out members of our body. I recently cast out a parathyroid gland that had gotten out of hand. This tiny gland, normally the size of a pea, had put my body out of balance. It had grown to the size of a marble and was causing calcium to be leached from my bones and thrown into my blood and urine. Now that inflated gland is gone and my body is returning to normal, but it's not been without pain and temporary weakness.

Our wards have a wide diversity of members. Once in a while there's one that throws the whole ward out of balance. Sometimes a member is cast out, but it's painful when that happens, and it weakens the ward. Often we feel like we're that superfluous gland in our ward. We feel we don't belong. I could really feel that way in my current ward since I've been in it for eight months and haven't received a calling. I miss having a calling because so many of my relationships in the church have come through callings. But having no calling has forced me to look for other ways to cultivate relationships in the church, and that's been interesting. Seeking relationships rather than taking them as they come is new to me because I always sought achievement, not relationships. I have to keep reminding myself that it's relationships that really matter, and it's because of relationships that I am here.

I am reminded of the Quaker hymn:

*'Tis a gift to be simple, 'Tis a gift to be free
'Tis a gift to come down where you ought to be
And when we find ourselves in the place just right
'Twill be in the valley of love and delight*

*When true simplicity is gained
To bow and to bend we shan't be ashamed
To turn, turn, will be our delight
Till by turning, turning we come round right.*

I feel I've come down where I ought to be, but it's not quite the valley of love and delight. But periodically I do get glimpses of that.

Thursday I had a doctor's appointment in a building two blocks from my childhood home. I looked out the window in the waiting room, and below me lay the world of my childhood. I could see Lake Michigan from the lighthouse at Lighthouse Beach to the Northwestern Campus. I could locate my elementary school and the home where I took piano lessons.

As a child, I knew the town street by street. It was eerie to look at it from above with a much broader perspective—not only due to my position but also to the years since I had wandered those streets. Often in my life, I find myself unable to see the forest for the trees. I am lost in the streets and can't get the bigger picture. The gospel does give me a framework for my life. It helps me make some sense of the daily details and the challenges that I still feel are more than necessary. But I really want to know the ending to find out if it all comes out all right. I don't understand why we need to have opposition in all things; I would rather have a nice, neat world without dissonance and unbalanced triangles. But knowing that the plan is to have opposition helps me deal with it. I think if I accepted it better I would be more comfortable bowing and bending.

Last year at the retreat I was given a scripture that I am grappling with:

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Proverbs 3:5-6

This is a hard scripture for me. I have come to realize in the past two years that trust is a major issue for me. One of my trust issues has been questioning whether God loves me. At one point last summer, I was in a really bad place. I went to my book group in Lancaster and really let loose with my frustrations and discouragement and questioning whether God loved me. The next day, I was going to the temple with some friends from book group. Another woman in the group told my friends, "Boy, I don't envy you going to the temple with her!" But in that temple session, we were told that God wanted each of us there to know that He loved us. For those of you who've been to the temple, you know this is not part of the ritual. This was not something you routinely hear. My friends with me looked at me knowingly. And now I cannot ever again deny that God loves me.

So, if I believe God loves me and he knows far better than I what is in my best interest, I should have no problem trusting the Lord. But "lean not unto thine own understanding?" I know unequivocally that my understanding is faulty, but understanding has always been my strength and my gift. To suggest I let go of that? However, I know that my understanding is of the streets. Rarely do I rise above the trees and see life from that perspective. Therein lies the challenge. For me, trust will always be the issue—how can I trust the Lord and still retain my curiosity?

To truly gain the gift of simplicity will require learning to trust the Lord—and perhaps even myself. I leave this challenge with those of you who, like me, are curious women. ✱

All the Time There Is

by Nancy Harward

Somehow, I missed even hearing about Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House* books when I was a kid. By the time the television series based on Ingalls' stories appeared, I had quit watching TV, so I had only a passing acquaintance with Laura and her pioneer family. Several years ago, however, when my daughter was studying American frontier life with her fourth grade class, she began to read the *Little House* series. I took the opportunity to read each book as soon as she was done with it, filling a void from my childhood that I hadn't even realized was there.

The first book, *Little House in the Big Woods*, describes a year in the first home Laura remembered, deep in Wisconsin fur trapping country. The second installment, *Little House on the Prairie*, tells how Laura's family decided to move west. Her father had heard that the U. S. government was opening "Indian Territory" to white settlement, and he wanted to be one of the first to make a claim in that vast, rich land. Loading a covered wagon with all it could carry, the Ingalls family traveled out of the woods and across the plains until they reached a spot near the Verdigris River, forty miles from the nearest town, where they thought they could be happy forever.

Laura vividly recounts the events of that year, from their crossing of the ice-bound Mississippi hours before it thawed to the planting of their first vegetables the following spring. She tells how her father cut and hauled lumber from the riverbank to build the little house and all the furnishings they needed. How he dug a well nearby so they wouldn't have to haul water all the way from the river. How that well helped to save their home

from a prairie fire. She describes her mother's sewing and wash days. How she made a broom to sweep the dirt floor before they were able to cover it with hand-smoothed wooden planks. The corncakes and rabbit stew they always ate, and how happy they were to have milk again after some passing cattlemen left a cow behind. The hard work, the patience, the sacrifices required to make a home in the wilderness.

And then Laura tells how one day, just after cultivating a garden with the precious plow her father had obtained in trade for the furs he had trapped all winter, the family was forced to move away from their little house because the government had decided to let the Indians keep that part of the land after all.

"A whole year gone, Charles!" Laura's mother sighed after they had packed the wagon again.

Laura and her sisters looked around at what they were leaving: the house with its warm stone hearth and real glass windows, the barn, the well, the cow, the plow. A year's worth of work.

But Laura's father cheerfully replied, "What's a year amount to? We have all the time there is."

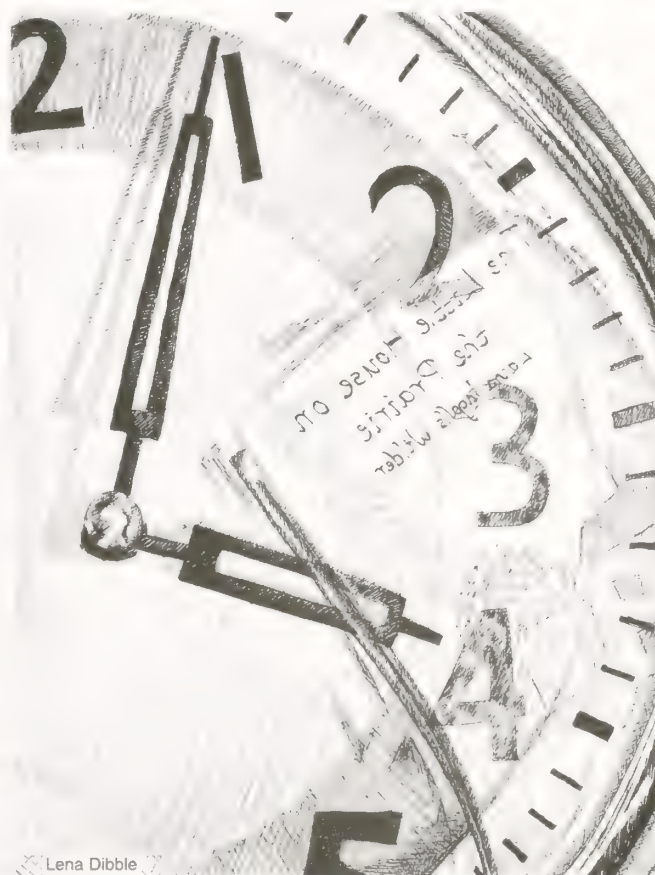
Would that all of us had Charles Ingalls's attitude. I am so hung up on time. I get impatient with the kids when they don't come to meals as soon as they're called. I resent telemarketers who needlessly make me drop what I'm doing to answer the phone. I fume when the traffic light turns red just before I get to it. Yet, like Charles, I have all the time there is. What is a year if I spend most of it feeling

frustrated and resentful because it's going by so fast?

One of the best weekends our family ever had was when snow clogged the roads of our unprepared community and forced everyone to stay home. For three days, we had all the time in the world, and we loved every moment of it. We played games. We read. We wrote letters. We made waffles and cookies and homemade pizza and a lot of other things that take time we usually think we don't have.

Now, when the roads are clear and the calendar isn't, the challenge is to remember that our time is still our own. Are we making the most of it? Are we enjoying it? Are we choosing to spend it in worthwhile ways in the company of those we love? Or does it simply disappear like snow in a spring rain?

Eventually, "all the time there is" will run out—but we'll still have all eternity. Always had it, always will. *



Lena Dibble

Farmer-Baker-Cellist: A Look at Desire

by Susan Paxman Hatch

Most kids are asked what they want to be when they grow up more times than they'd care to respond. When our son Chandler was in grade school, his consistent answer was, "I want to be a farmer-baker-cellist." He was very sure about it because this hybrid profession combined his three then-favorite activities: growing plants, baking cookies, and playing the cello. I think he pictured himself out on a big farm somewhere in middle America, growing fantastic crops in summer, eating tantalizing fresh baked goods in winter, and entertaining himself with his own music year round. It was a nice dream, and we encouraged him to nurture it. This was the same kid, after all, who had declared to us at age three, "There's a barnyard in my head!" At ten, Chandler headed toward a cozy place in the Land of Leafy Green Agriculture despite the fact that no one in our extended family has farmed for several generations.

Years later, Chandler's personality has evolved, and along the way he's adopted a different set of desires. As he prepares to leave for college, he wants to study economics or computer science or biology. (Maybe he could be an economist-computer-scientist-biologist, but somehow that doesn't trip off the tongue like farmer-baker-cellist.) He immerses himself in history books and biographies of U.S. presidents. He plans to minor in Russian Studies because he loves Russian novels and composers like Prokofiev and Shostakovich. Somewhere along the way he lost his desire to plant crops. In the kitchen, he rarely cooks anything except oatmeal, quesadillas, or pizza straight from the freezer.

I've thought quite a bit about this process of change and growth, about the way our desires and interests wax and wane as we travel through our ages. What changes when the boy who grew so many grapefruit and orange plants from seed no longer cares to keep trying? What shifts to stop the imaginative, original cookie recipes from being produced? An easy answer would be to say lack of discipline or consistency, but Chandler has self-discipline in abundance—as do many others who change their interests.

There is an element of experimentation that got lost—at least in those specific areas. There's a change in values in the broadest sense—what Chandler values, what he wants, has altered. He lost something, I think, but maybe not the most important thing. He lost interest in baking cookies and experimenting with his own combinations of ingredients, but he carries an interest in all kinds of other experiments: physics, chemistry, male-female relationships, political thinking, faith and belief. He lost his desire to save seeds from the foods we eat and no longer plants them in pots near the back door, but in a more abstract sense he's planting seeds all the time: seeds of curiosity about new facts, of attaching one idea to another and seeing the interrelationship, of putting effort into a project to see where it will lead him.

I watch this process happen in other people, too. It's not surprising that when a teenager wants to be different from her parents, she chooses a path that will take her away from them and their qualities and interests. Don't want to be like suburban Mom with her traditional outlook? Try gothic; drop church activity. Want independence? Sometimes enough to do any-

thing you can to come by it? Try drugs and escape. Yearn for a marked, tangible difference. Or if what a teen wants most is to be like others, then blending in becomes the task. Wear clothes that look like other people's clothes, get the *au courant* haircut, and so forth. These are superficial examples of the way our desires alter who we are. Yet as we evolve, traces of our former loves cling to us. What we want often informs our choices.

I have a friend, Claire, who values being kind; it's what she wants from all of us. I can tell because I have never heard Claire say anything unkind to anyone. She has a bumper sticker on her minivan that says *JUST BE NICE*, and that philosophy guides her behavior. She cares deeply about it. Her desire affects her behavior. One of my favorite C. S. Lewis quotations extends this idea to our character: *Every time you make a choice you are turning the central part of you, the part of you that chooses, into something a little different from what it was before. And taking your life as a whole, with all your innumerable choices, all your life long you are slowly turning this central thing either into a heavenly creature or into a hellish creature.* (Mere Christianity, p. 86)

Wanting is complicated business, of course, as Lewis knew. It's possible to want something, tangible or intangible, and not obtain it. It's possible to want something good and have it remain out of reach, just as it's possible to desire something bad or negative and still choose an alternative good. Author Rachel Remen calls this "turning toward our goodness." Unfortunately, it's also feasible to want the wrong things and seek them to the exclusion of the good and wholesome.

Years ago at a Midwest Pilgrims retreat, Kathleen Flake told us that she believes the question of Judgment is this: "What do you want?" I keep thinking about that question seven years later. Can it be so straightforward? Is that what God will ask of us? After pondering it for ages, I agree with Kathleen—because what we want, what we truly desire, determines who we are in a very essential way. This question of Judgment itself might be straightforward, but our thoughtful response to it brings forth every nuance of our values and choices. It causes us to examine the substance of our being, the creatures we have turned ourselves into, hellish or heavenly or some sort in between.

On the surface, all that is left from Chandler's farmer-baker-cellist phase is this: a very odd looking grapefruit tree named Citrus Bitrus that stands ten feet tall in our family room; a stack of his original cookie recipes scrawled in awkward, childish penmanship; and a cello that gets played regularly. To describe these items distorts and abbreviates the story, however, because there are many almost imperceptible remnants of our farmer-baker-cellist as well. For instance, we all have memories of the interesting cookies Chandler baked and served to us. Every so often someone still calls out, "How long has it been since anyone watered Citrus Bitrus?" We also love to hear Chandler practicing Elgar on the cello for the high school concerto competition or Bach for his own pleasure. In addition, Chandler carries with him the character benefits that come from pursuing something worthwhile for many years.

It wasn't a waste for Chandler to want what he did, even though he no longer wants some of it. When he loved planting trees from seed, Chandler learned all about photosynthesis and patience and about how our Midwest climate would prevent



Citrus Bitrus

Citrus Bitrus (bless her heart) from ever bearing fruit. He retains the agricultural knowledge he grasped while he wanted to be a farmer. He's still curious about science and the way things work. When he experimented with combining odd ingredients to make his "Sloppy, Grimy, Minty Cookies," he learned about the properties of baking powder, soda, various flavorings, and oven temperatures. Now he tries out a variety of foods from other countries, going out with friends for lamb vindaloo or to the Diho Asian Market for exotic snacks. Even when he stopped imagining a cello-farm combination, he kept practicing his instrument. Years later, he is a fine musician with the ability to perform solo in front of a crowd. In this case, he kept practicing because he kept wanting to be a cellist. "That which hath been is now." (Ecclesiastes 3:15) The desire that impelled him to practice as a fourth grader is fed by the desire to be a better musician as he matures.

Had he not wanted to be a farmer-baker-cellist when he was in fifth grade, Chandler would be a different young man than he is now. We all contain remnants of what we have

desired along the way. In that sense, it was a productive use of energy for Chandler to desire those things—with this caveat: it was productive as long as what he desired was inherently good. Fortunately for all of us, much of what life offers to us is just that—inherently good. Growth-producing, mind-expanding, soul-enriching goodness abounds.

In a more important vein, we Christians talk about taking upon ourselves the name of Christ, but I rarely think about the role desire plays in that process. If what I really want is to be comfortable and take it easy, I might lean toward doing the things that make that ease possible—with the result that I might also stagnate in my progress toward becoming anything better than I am right now. On the other hand, if I really truly desire to be like Jesus, I will be more likely to risk discomfort and pain and be willing to sacrifice lesser values in order to become Christlike. In this endeavor, I will also need to rely on the Savior to feed my desire for growth and wholeness.

In I Nephi 11, the Spirit of the Lord asks Nephi, "What desirest thou?" This question seems to me much like asking, "What is your heart's true desire?" Jesus asks a similar question of his disciples in John: "What seek ye?" Imagine Jesus asking each of us that question of significant desire. If we can answer that our deepest desire is to be charitable, tolerant, wise, and filled with integrity, we are further along the way to becoming those things than we would otherwise be. If we truly invest our energy in and make our choices based on what we want, the things we pay attention to along the way alter us. Our loves, our desires mark us, either constricting our hearts and impeding our wholeness or expanding and softening us, turning us to our own goodness and to God. ✱

Growth and Change



by Charlotte Cannon Johnston

I live in Hyde Park, a racially integrated neighborhood on the south side of Chicago that is home to the University of Chicago. I moved here in 1959 with my husband, Peter, and our two young boys for Peter's residency in psychiatry. It was a significant challenge for me to move to Chicago. I grew up on a farm close to Blackfoot, a small town in Idaho. Although I had graduated from BYU, I felt I had never lived away from my family or the Church. It was like jumping off the edge of the earth for me to move to urban Chicago.

When my four year old asked whether we would have a yard, I replied, "I'm not sure there is grass in Chicago." I must have thought my new home would be all concrete with no green spaces. I worried about safety. I had heard that the doctors in Peter's program went from building to building underground to be safe. I had also heard about the cold, humid winters. When shopping for a coat in Salt Lake, I asked to see the warmest coat in the store. I was also apprehensive about meeting groups of people new to me. I had never known Jews or African-Americans. I had expected that Peter would be the only Mormon psychiatry resident but not that he would be the only one who wasn't Jewish. I was hesitant to attend an orientation party for psychiatry residents because it was billed as a beer party.

In the forty odd years I have lived in Chicago, I have undergone significant changes—as has the Church. When we came in 1959, our ward was meeting in a building built in the late 1920s. The building, just south of Hyde Park in Woodlawn, was where stake conference was held for the entire Chicago area until 1960. The University Ward building was modeled, on a humbler scale, after Rockefeller Chapel, an impressive Gothic cathedral-like interdenominational building on the campus. It had high vaulted ceilings; a balcony at the front of the chapel for the choir, which was also where the bishopric sat; and a state-of-the art pipe organ. Unfortunately, the building had few classrooms, was difficult to heat, and forced the bishopric to be elevated and separate from the congregation. When Church Authorities came to dedicate the building in 1929, they told the bishopric to come down from their loft and sit closer to the people! The story goes that it was this building that caused the creation of the Church Building Committee.

By the 1950s, the major problem was not the building itself but its location. After World War I, African-Americans migrated north in increasingly large numbers in hopes of finding work. Many settled on the south side of Chicago. This was a time of great racial unrest. Unemployment and the crime rate were high. Members in the south suburbs feared driving through black neighborhoods and meeting in Woodlawn. As in Washington, D.C., and other cities, the Church elected to leave an urban setting. In 1960 the building was sold to an African-American congregation.

For two and a half years, we met in a small YMCA. The makeshift conditions in that building had people sitting on folding chairs in the gym for sacrament meeting; the Relief Society

presidency meeting in the women's restroom; our Sunday School class meeting in the front foyer and later down the street in a doctor's office; and Primary classes—years before the current consolidated schedule—meeting on Sunday in clusters around the perimeter of the gym. We joked about using the swimming pool for baptisms. We could hear the "cazong" of the candy machines during fast meeting.

In 1962 an enterprising ward member located an old mansion that had been used for several years by the Loring School for Girls. The home was located on a lovely two-acre site on a hill—the only one in Chicago—in Beverly, an area in the southwest portion of the city. The students, who comprised about half of the ward members, lived in Hyde Park, a forty-minute drive through heavy traffic and urban neighborhoods. A family would often have to make three long trips during the week for Relief Society, Primary, and Mutual and two on Sunday for the morning meetings and, later, for sacrament meeting.

Members came from very different socio-economic and educational backgrounds. Sometimes strain existed between some of the long-time Chicago residents, often of humble means, and some of the students, who thought of themselves as poor but left after finishing their schooling on their way to promising careers. For the most part, long-time members and students learned from each other and melded into a cohesive group.

Several families moved to Beverly in anticipation of the new chapel being built. To raise money for the building—back in the days when ward members had to come up with a percentage of the building's cost—we held bazaars and rummage and baked goods sales. I remember Peter selling mail-order shoes to raise money for

the building. Morale was high. Y. C. Wong, a renowned Chicago architect, was hired to design the building. His striking modern modular building, designed specifically for the site, was deemed too *avant garde* by the Church. We were very disappointed. Plans from a Church architect stalled. By this time, the racial composition of Beverly was changing, and the Church again elected to leave an urban setting.

In 1974 we became members of the newly created Chicago Heights Stake. I was asked to serve as stake Relief Society president. By 1975, our visionary stake president had divided the historic University Ward into the Hyde Park Branch and the Beverly Ward. The ward rented space in several Protestant churches until the Church built a chapel in 1980 in Orland Park. Places for the branch to meet were limited because the value of Hyde Park real estate had risen steadily over the years and little land was available. We began meeting in a three-story duplex with seventy-five members in what had been the living room of the third floor apartment.

We were a very cohesive group. Enthusiasm ran high. We invited the community to a spectacular quilt show and pictorial displays to explain who we were and to announce that we were here as part of the community. We had a readers theater, gave concerts, and talked of growing tomatoes aquatically on the roof of the building. For a stake welfare fair, our exhibit was on the history of storing food back to the time of the Egyptians. Peter, who was branch president, was innovative about ways to involve the mostly student congregation. For instance, he had open meetings to field questions and hear the suggestions and concerns of the members. One enterprising member built a box for his child and others to be baptized in to save the trip to the closest font at the stake center, an hour away. We knew a

baptism was scheduled when we saw the hose trailing from "the blue box," as it came to be called, through the basement rooms back to the plumbing.

The 1978 revelation granting the priesthood to all worthy men was welcome news in our congregation; the doctrine of exclusion had made many branch members uncomfortable and had caused several members to leave the Church over the years. Within a year of the revelation's announcement, several black members joined the church. The ward leadership initiated programs to help the new members become familiar and comfortable with the culture of the Church and to help long-time members appreciate and be comfortable with the culture of the new members. Hyde Park prides itself on being a model of successful integration.

The Branch became a ward in 1986 but was soon bursting at the seams. By the end of sixteen years in the duplex, we were holding simultaneous sacrament meetings on three floors. A building committee appointed by the Church diligently tried to find land for a new building. We had our sights on prime property. A University of Chicago architect, who was trying to help us find property, complained that we would settle for nothing less

than having our building by the flagpole in the center of campus. Using ingenious methods, in true Hyde Park style, we raised \$100,000 for the building. Soon afterwards, the Church assumed the entire responsibility of financing buildings.

Chris Kimball, grandson of President Kimball, was instrumental in the acquisition of property for our building at 52nd and University, just blocks away from campus. One of the first to be built by the Church in an urban setting for many years, the chapel was dedicated in 1992 by Elder Oaks, a former student and then professor at the University of Chicago Law School. We were now meeting in a regular church building for the first time in thirty-two years. Currently, our ward, a Spanish-speaking ward, and a thriving Singles branch all meet in our building. The number of students has increased dramatically.

The original Chicago Stake, organized in 1936, was the first stake between Colorado and New York since the pioneer era. (Before that we were part of the Northern Stakes Mission.) The stake encompassed all of the greater Chicago area and remained that entity until 1963, when the Milwaukee and Chicago South Stakes spun off from the original stake. In 1998, the Chicago Stake, a truly urban stake with the same name as the original one, was created. Our miniature stake center at 32nd and Pulaski, twenty minutes rather than an hour from Hyde Park, is in the heart of a Spanish-speaking community. Most of the ward buildings are in the city in urban settings close to public transportation. Ironically, one of the new buildings is less than a mile from the prime two-acre site in Beverly that we sold twenty-five years ago.

The membership of the Chicago Stake comes from several racial groups. While the major racial group remains

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Building in Woodlawn used by the Church from 1929-59

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Caucasian, three of the nine wards are Spanish-speaking. African-American members are in all of the other wards. The stake president's wife is Spanish as is one of his counselors. Hispanics and African-Americans hold many positions of leadership.

Historically, the Church has gained strength as an institution by separating itself from the society around us. This solidification of our identity was necessary in pioneer times, and we prided ourselves on being a "peculiar," separate people. In the 1970s, when Relief Society members were asked to keep track of hours spent on compassionate service, only service extended to a church member counted. Now community service is a hallmark of Relief Society. The Church has also been generous in its financial support of an inner city youth summer program initiated by Hyde Park ward members ten years ago.

The former insularity of church members helps explain why many students have come and left Chicago without really having been here. They remained tied to the West and never, as we said, "unpacked their bags." They limited their social ties to church members and didn't enjoy the cultural riches that Chicago offers. I understand these feelings. I, too, have strong ties to the West. When our children were growing up, we spent each summer in Utah and Idaho with family. When we moved to Hyde Park, I was very aware of feeling different from non-Mormons and avoided social situations where that difference was apparent. Once a thoughtful hostess, knowing I didn't drink tea or coffee, asked if I would like some milk. I agreed. I felt very conspicuous when she appeared with a tall glass of milk in a clear glass.

Over the years, I have developed friendships with many people who



The Hyde Park Chapel

aren't Mormon. When my older children were in high school, I became president of a board that planned social activities for teenagers. I came to realize that the other parents and I were alike in more ways than we were different and that we had similar concerns and aspirations for our children.

My discomfort with people not members of the Church included African-Americans. I had never known a black person until I moved to Chicago. I was apprehensive about living in an integrated community. When we were living in student housing, new neighbors moved across the hall. We met the husband first, who was Caucasian. I remember my shock when I met his wife Ellen, an African-American. We became good friends.

During the years we met in Beverly, so much of my time and energy was spent there or traveling to get there that it was almost as if I lived in Beverly, not in integrated Hyde Park. When we began meeting in Hyde Park, my involvement in the community increased significantly. After the priesthood revelation in 1978, I developed more friendships with African-Americans. I returned to school during this period, got my master's degree, and became a reading specialist at an interracial school in Hyde Park. I came to know and

love my African-American students and colleagues.

Over the years, our home has been a home-away-from-home for many. In the early days of the Branch, we could host all the Hyde Park church members in our home and often did for Christmas parties, weddings, baby showers, and graduations. Single ward members have rented space in our home and were wonderful models for our children.

When my husband Peter was diagnosed with colon cancer in 1997 and when he died in early 1999, we received many letters and phone calls of appreciation and love from former branch members. Many mentioned how much it meant to them that Peter was both a respected psychiatrist and an active church member. And they appreciated coming to our home.

I came to a realization of the journey we had made. In spite of myself, I had fallen in love with Chicago and had enjoyed making many non-member friends. We had helped establish the Church in Hyde Park. We had raised our four children in urban Hyde Park. We were urban pioneers. Our coming to Chicago and Peter's choice of psychiatry as a profession were blessings in our lives and in the lives of others.

We change and grow as individuals and as a Church. Often the change is much slower than we would like. We lose good people along the way who become impatient with Church members' shortcomings. Sometimes we lose ourselves for a time. It helps to give the Church, ourselves, and each other more space to grow, to change, and to realize that differences can be healthy. This is our church. I want to have a voice in the direction that the Church and we as members take. Living in Hyde Park has given me some opportunities to do this. ✱

Ward Transit

by Ann Gardner Stone

My friends tell me that I am the only person they know who has had the same phone number for decades. I'm not sure what that says about me or about them except that they have moved, some a lot, and I haven't.

I have lived in the same Midwestern ward for over twenty-five years, which makes me an anomaly. I am what's known as an "old-timer" and have been for a long time—even before the streaks of gray in my hair made me obviously suited for the title. This ward is unlike wards of the West where I grew up, wards where people lived and were buried and the population seldom changed except when ward boundaries were redrawn. However, it is like many of the wards around urban population centers or major educational institutions. Located in a suburb of Chicago, close to Northwestern University and its high-quality graduate schools and in a prime corporate corridor where business execs shuttle in and out, it possesses the perfect conditions for transience. And that is the kind of ward we have—one where people stop, but only briefly.

When I first moved into the ward, it was more of a typical suburban ward with many stable families, lots of leadership, a thriving youth program, and a steady flux of students who passed through at varying intervals. We had dental students who were committed for at least four years; a few medical students and residents arrived from time to time. Many MBAs came for one or two years. A handful of Ph.D. candidates would wander through, and then there were the corporate executives who sailed in for unspecified amounts of time, but usually not long-term. For the most

part, these "transients" provided new energy, were available to fill staffing gaps, and made it fun to introduce them to life beyond the Wasatch front. Some stayed and put down roots, but mostly they did their two or four years and were gone.

There are pros and cons to this sort of church social structure. Some of the positives I've mentioned: fresh ideas and new perspectives, people not burned out by the chronic problems facing any ward, a steady supply of new friend possibilities, an abundance of outstanding musical talent (because of Northwestern's great music program), and a new crop of potential Scout leaders and Young Women's leaders. The negatives include that perennial problem of the few new people who never "unpack" and spend their time here yearning for the West, or worse, telling us how "quaint" it is to be in the "mission field." Those comments really seem to mean, "Why can't you do things the way they do in Utah—the RIGHT way?" The impermanence fosters a tendency to avoid building meaningful and long-term relationships because you know that this new friend is just going to move in a year.

I have had to say good-bye to too many good friends over the years. It is a wrenching and painful experience. Feelings of rejection bubble to the surface. Chicago—meaning "me"—must not be fun enough, spiritual enough, challenging enough or they would not need to leave for something better. People make noises about coming back to visit, but only a handful ever do. You know they have moved on with their lives, are having new exciting experiences, are making new friends to replace you. All you have is another farewell party to plan and a void to fill.

When new people arrive, you may hold back and thus run the risk of being perceived as standoffish or unfriendly. Or perhaps worse, you miss the opportunity to get to know someone wonderful. Often the ward leadership institutes the well-meant practice of making sure the new people feel welcome. There are special dinners, get-acquainted events, and a concerted effort to have all the newcomers speak in Sacrament meeting. What this often means is that the newcomers bond only with each other and there are permanent ward members who haven't spoken in a Sacrament meeting for years. When I hear the oft-repeated phrase, "I really miss the mountains" in a talk, I'd love to hear it followed with "but I really like your lake." Or when the obligatory reference to the "brutal Chicago winters" is made, would it be so hard to say something like, "but I can see that they have built your character and made you strong"? I also wonder if the steady stream of well-educated, well-trained students that fill the leadership pool keep new converts from sharpening their skills and developing their spiritual muscles because they are not needed—or at least don't think they are.

My ward has continued to change over the years. It hasn't grown—in fact, it has gotten smaller, and although we aren't struggling, I wouldn't call us thriving. Housing costs have prohibited younger couples just out of school from settling in the area, even if they might want to. Our Primary has shrunk, Seminary has shriveled, and the youth are few in number. Many of our families have sent children to BYU only to see them stay out West. When the parents reach retirement age, they seem to migrate west as well—often to be near their

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Building Neighborhoods, Building Trust

by Rebecca Chandler

My daughter's instructions were to take the Nimitz Freeway north to the 89th Avenue exit, somehow get myself to East 115th Avenue, turn left on Eddes Road, cross railroad tracks after a while, and watch for a building site on the left. She hoped I wouldn't get lost. My mother's instructions were more straightforward: I wasn't to let anything happen to her practically new Saturn. She needn't have worried, and, as it turn out, neither should I.

A crowd was gathering as I pulled onto a short block with seven houses in various stages of completion. The Habitat site director asked the fifty or so volunteers if anyone had actual construction skills. He needed a finish carpenter, someone who knew about plumbing, and an electrician. Four or five individuals indicated that they could finish, plumb, and electrify, and they were siphoned off to work on the newly framed structures on the north side of the street. The rest of us were divided into teams—those willing to do “high work” and those who were not. While the former positioned themselves on extension ladders, the latter group, myself included, was dispatched to three almost-finished houses on the south side of the street.

“Mom!” I heard a familiar voice. “I want you on my crew.” My daughter Michael sauntered into the crowd, looking very much at home in paint-splattered jeans and work boots. Her sweatshirt read: “HABITAT: The Momentum is BUILDING.”

Our family had heard all about Michael's volunteer work with AmeriCorps at Christmastime. This was an opportunity for me to visit her in California's East Bay and to see up

close what it was all about. She put me to work painting trim on a blue house, the third one from the corner. Over the course of the morning, I stirred paint and traded tasks, tales, and paintbrushes with six or eight individuals—a thirty-something account executive in designer jeans, a fifth grade science teacher, a business student in dreadlocks, a career counselor from a local high school, the head of a Catholic school for girls, and the mayor of a nearby town. For most of the morning, my partner was Simeko, an intern from Northern Japan who was spending two weeks in the United States learning about American volunteerism. What mystified her was the American preoccupation with home ownership. Hardly anyone in Osaka ever aspired beyond finding a good apartment to rent.

By mid-morning, the street was filled with people carrying siding and plaster-board and hauling lumber or fencing. Power saws were trimming boards, and the sound of hammers echoed from inside as well as from outside. Sweatshirts and jackets were shed as the California sunshine prevailed. The entire scene reminded me of the Amish barn-raising scene in the movie *Witness*—only without the orchestra and without Harrison Ford.

Every now and then, Michael would come through checking on volunteers, getting supplies, making suggestions, and answering questions. She particularly enjoyed critiquing my work (“A little more paint, Mom—see, you missed that corner spot—now catch that drip”), a nice chance to reciprocate for the years and years of family chores she did under my direction. When she could find a free minute or two, she would drag someone over to meet me. Many were interns, like herself, most of them recent college graduates who wanted a practical outlet

for their idealism before making career plans or deciding on graduate school. There were also some regular volunteers—sometimes coming out several times a month to help at a site. “Habitat can be habit forming,” I heard over and over again.

One or two at a time, I also met the owners of these new homes—people who knew my daughter well. Most had been around the work site for months, and they literally lit up when they learned who I was. They enveloped me in spontaneous embraces and proclaimed that my daughter was both beautiful and good and that I must be a remarkable mother. I didn't know enough Spanish to demure. Julio, a carpenter, and his family would live in a four-bedroom house. Robin, a worker on the Oakland Airport tarmac, and her three children would live next-door. The Mendosa family, recently arrived from San Salvador, would take up residence in the third house.

As if by some pre-arranged signal, everyone broke at noon for lunch. Clusters of volunteer groups formed, but the gatherings were fluid and open. Many had brought drinks or fresh fruit and granola bars enough to share along with their conversation. It was a tranquil period before the last big push of the afternoon. A “move-in” ceremony had been scheduled at three o'clock for the three nearly finished houses on the south side of the street. The plan was to have those houses finished—or at least finished looking—in the next two hours. The frenzy was contagious as a concentration of volunteers got the last of the exterior touch-ups done, the windows uncovered and polished, the gates hung, and the porches swept. A banner that read “Welcome HOME” fluttered over the middle house.

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Alpha House



by Patti Thomas Hanks

I'm the development director at Alpha House, a homeless shelter for families in Ann Arbor, Michigan. We take people in, literally, out of unheated abandoned buildings and their cars and give them a place to regroup. One of the kids who has been here for a month or so (and finally has his immunizations caught up and is back in school, praise God) came into my office and saw a framed picture of Alpha House on my desk and said, "How come you have a picture of my house on your desk?" I said, "Because I really like your house." He said, "Okay, you can keep it then."

We've recently had a big-time grant cut, and I have had to dig in and find some individuals to help me keep the doors open. You know, we have to up the defense budget so we can kill babies in Iraq and cut money to social programs so we can starve the ones that live all around us. (Okay, my Friday morning tirade.) It costs us \$20 to house one child for one night; \$500 provides twenty-five children with a day of living in a warm, safe place. Another way to look at it is that \$600 will keep a child sheltered and well for a month.

Who are the homeless? In ever increasing numbers, sad to say, they are children. According to the Education Project for Homeless Youth, children are the fastest growing population among the homeless, representing more than 43% of all homeless people. The National Campaign for Jobs and Income found that child poverty is at an historic high, with nearly one out of every five children in America living today in poverty. Even in a booming economy, at least 2.3 million adults and children, or nearly one percent of the U. S. population, is likely to experience a spell of homelessness at least once during the year. These are people who live in the streets, in temporary overnight shelters, in cars, in campgrounds, or in overcrowded or dangerous dwellings. Today, 36% of homeless people are families with little children—many of them young mothers who are fleeing domestic violence and lack the work skills, access to child care, or access to jobs necessary to support their families.*

These statistics are discouraging, but each day, devoted (and usually way underfunded) organizations and individuals work together for a common goal: to end homelessness. Sheltering one another is a basic and powerful act of humanity, but it takes many hands to provide refuge to homeless children and their families as they regroup and plan for the future. Yesterday, a young mother came into the shelter with her one- and two-year-old sons after spending several months bouncing between friends' couches and her car. While she brought in her bags and boxes of belongings, our Shelter Coordinator, Latania, took the children into the dining room. When the mom walked into the dining room and saw her boys having crackers, small chunks of

**National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2002*

turkey, and juice boxes, she started sobbing. She said, "Just seeing them eating up at the table. . . . It's so good to see them with food at a table."

Here's a sponsorship program we offered in our area that I now offer to all of you *Exponent II* readers:

We're going to tell your mother on you! In honor of Mother's Day, when you sponsor a homeless child at Alpha House, we'll send a beautiful handwritten note to your mother, letting her know that you have supported the "One Child, One Night" program in her name and in her honor. Can you think of anything she'd like more? Your gift to "One Child, One Night" is a wonderful way to remind your mother that you were listening when she said, "Be nice and help others." (Sorry, we can't help with "Make your bed," "Don't run with scissors," and "Stop eating the paste.") Please send us your name and address, your mother's name and address, and your donation to:

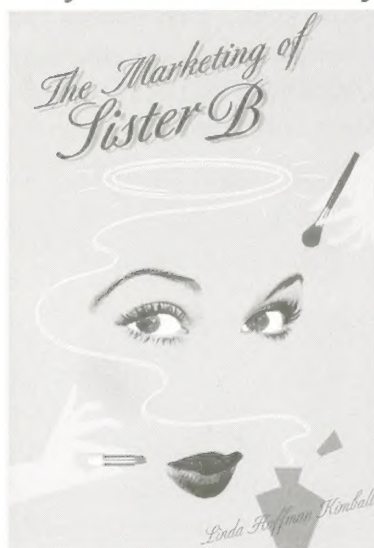
IHN Alpha House
4290 Jackson Road
Ann Arbor, MI 48103

We will also be pleased to accept donations for a child at Alpha House in memory of your mother. Interfaith Hospitality Network of Washtenaw County (IHN) at Alpha House is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt corporation serving homeless families. Our tax exempt number is 38-3052598. If you have any questions, you can email me at pthanks@alphahouse-ihn.org. *



A Loving Lampoon

by Debbie Blakely



The Marketing of Sister B, Signature Books, Salt Lake City, 2002

If only my ward's Relief Society announcements were as entertaining as this: *Enrichment is next week on Thursday the 12th. Sign-ups are going around. There are three classes. One will be on Christmas crafts, and you'll need to bring lace, ribbons, and tampons for that one. The second class is about how to make good use of things that expire in the back of your fridge. The last class is a slide show on fashion called "From Twiggy to Fabio."*

With numerous laugh-out-loud paragraphs like this one, *The Marketing of Sister B* is a delightfully quirky romp through the twists and turns of Mormon culture. As the author, *Exponent II*'s own Linda Hoffman Kimball, explains on the back cover, this book is more than a comedy: "Wafting through this affectionate frolic are some serious questions. Who defines us? What constitutes our identity? What is authentic and what is, well, marketing?"

The Marketing of Sister B is the story of Donna Brooks, a down-to-earth LDS mother and wife who becomes an instant national celebrity as she ends up marketing a dramatically appeal-

ing scent that she whipped up as a favor for a visiting teaching luncheon. The chaotic and challenging result of Donna's instant fame gives the reader an opportunity to get to know some delightful and distinctly Mormon women. Donna in particular is a refreshing blend of no-nonsense assertiveness mixed with kindness and a firm devotion to LDS standards. She is someone I would love to have as a best friend.

When I asked Linda Kimball why she writes humorous fiction, she replied that the humor made it easier to get away with addressing some of the darker sides of Mormon culture. "I like to lampoon lovingly," she said. Her style is light-hearted and yet pointed enough to cause us to view our culture and ourselves with a bit more honesty. One of the ways that Linda's story gently nudges us toward these important questions is to feature some sharply unique characters. These always humorous and mostly lovable characters seem able to retain their authenticity despite considerable pressure to be who others want them to be.

One of Donna's finest moments occurs when she stands up for herself in the face of a manipulated misrepresentation of her identity. I wanted to yell, "You go, girl!" when Donna took control of a horde of hungry reporters by saying: "*I have been promoting a simple product which is intended to engender some kindness and good will. Throughout this experience, I have found that time and again, my standards, my lifestyle, and my very identity have been drawn and quartered. . . . Attempts have been made to change me into someone I am not. . . . Perhaps by embarking on this voyage, I invited people to judge me. I now realize that I was naive. I have my faults. I chew my nails. I bark at my kids. I am occasionally a klutz. . . .*" One of

Donna's most endearing qualities is that she seems truly unimpressed with herself, despite all the media attention. It is refreshing to discover an LDS heroine who takes her religious convictions quite seriously at the same time that she avoids taking herself too seriously. In Donna, I recognize many Mormon women who have yet to discover how assertive they really are or can be.

When asked what motivates her to write, Linda replied, "I've learned that if I neglect the spiritual side of me or the creative side of me, there are problems in my life. Writing is one of my creative outlets. I begin to feel twitchy if I've not found time to write." Linda came up with the idea that led to *Sister B* almost eight years ago, shortly after the publication of her first novel, *Home to Roost*. The process of bringing this book to completion and getting it published—with two moves in between—sounds like a pioneer trek. Linda posts quotations on the edges of her computer monitor to keep her motivated. One simply says, "Have no expectations." (Alice Walker)

"This quote reminds me that I'd better enjoy the process and the product and not be doing it for anyone else's praise," Linda says. "This doesn't necessarily work for me, mind you, but it's a great reminder." Another of Linda's monitor notes is this set of lines from Mary-Claire King: "I think there are two keys to being creatively productive. One is not being daunted by one's fear of failure, the second is sheer perseverance." Linda's readers are the fortunate beneficiaries of her perseverance.

You can order an inscribed copy of *The Marketing of Sister B* from Ann Stone, who can be reached at her shop via email—Naturally@ync.net—or by phone: 847-869-2233. *

Good Luck With That

by Marnie Leavitt

A few years ago, a group of us mid-life women, including some non-conformists and a few of the ever-faithful, used to stand in the foyer outside the Relief Society room during Sunday School and talk. It was very interesting talk, if I do say so myself. One of the more entertaining characters in the group was my close friend, Patti.

Patti is currently the development director for our local homeless shelter, and she is very good at her job. I tease her by saying that fund-raising is Institutionalized Seduction, because that's exactly what she does: seduces people with her smile and her charm and her wit into contributing to a worthy cause. "That's right," she laughs, "Just call me a 'ho for the homeless.'" Her voice is rich; she can make "You ass, you!" sound like an endearment.

So, there we were, about six of us, standing around in the hallway at the beginning of Sunday School class, discussing the weighty matters of womanhood, when along came the Sunday School president.

James was on loan from another university, vying for a permanent teaching position in the business school here. From my perspective, James hadn't a funny bone in his body. He wore stark black suits with starched white shirts, which made his skin look pasty in contrast, like someone perpetually on the edge of panic. I tried to warm up to him—and failed. He was just too prickly: taking offense when no offense was intended, pronouncing judgment when (it seemed to me) he could afford to be kind.

Our bishop, a corporate accountant, was determined to make our large, liberal congregation more homoge-

nous. He had apparently assigned James to patrol the hallways, picking off repeat offenders and herding them to their designated classrooms. James would march the concourse during Sunday School, circling round and round from front hallway, past the YW rooms, past the side door, past the bishop's office, past the Primary rooms to the back foyer, near the Relief Society room, where we were standing.

On this particular Sunday, we noticed, idly, that James had passed us at least once already, looking baleful. It wasn't long before he returned. This time he stopped and ostentatiously cleared his throat: "Ladies, Sunday School has already started."

We "ladies" were too engrossed in our discussion to pay him much mind. Somebody glanced up and acknowledged his presence with a "Yeah, we know." We were probably trading tips on dysfunctional families and weren't in the mood to be interrupted. Our conversation continued.

After a few minutes, James came round again, as dogged as the officious hallway monitor in junior high. He planted himself in front of us and waited. We broke out of our huddle, momentarily, to see why he was standing there without speaking.

"Ladies," he said, "as the ward Sunday School President, the bishop has asked me to make sure that everyone—and that includes you—attends their assigned classes."

Patti, who had been interrupted in her monologue mid-stream, turned and gave him her full attention. Looking him in the eye, she smiled broadly—the brilliant, open-faced smile of a confident woman—and said (in the same genuinely warm-hearted

tone as one would say "Happy birthday" or "Bon voyage!"): "Good luck with that!"

This amiable send-off was accompanied by a magnanimous wave of her well-manicured hand, as though she were offering him the remaining 99.2% of the hallway and any errant occupants he could nab. Without missing a beat, she turned back to the space we had laid claim to, and continued, "As I was saying . . ."

I caught a glimpse of his startled, now-whadda-I-do? expression out of the corner of my eye. I don't remember what happened after that. Whatever Patti was saying was much more interesting.

The moral of the story? "Never underestimate the power of a mature woman."

When I think back on this encounter, a statement from theologian-psychologist Paschal Baute comes to mind: "Genuine authority seeks the growth of others. Authoritarianism seeks to control others. Ministry is service, no more, no less." For whatever reasons—fear, rage, insecurity, pain—James wasn't ready to relate to us in good faith, as friends. He needed to be in control.

At their best, religious communities are all about communication and growth. Although we, as women, do not determine the organizational agenda, each of us has the power to disarm. "Good luck with that" was Patti's way of saying, "Do what you need to do, but as you can see, our priorities are different from yours." "Good luck with that" has become a motto of sorts for our group when we encounter authority barreling over communication and individualism. *

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Sawhorses were arranged as benches in a semi-circle in front of Robin's house, and more people arrived. The new homeowners reappeared dressed in their Sunday best. As we pushed all evidence of work yet to be completed out of sight, we were invited to join the crowd gathered to witness the "moving-in" ceremony. And it was moving. The site director thanked all the volunteers for the one thousand hours of work that had gone into each of the three houses. Homeowners were presented with keys, a hammer, and an opportunity to speak to the crowd. They told us how committed the families were to building a real neighborhood in this blighted section of East Oakland. Each family was also

presented with a Bible, which surprised me. Habitat is non-sectarian and prides itself on helping families without regard for race, color, creed, or ethnic background. But, as Michael later explained, it is "faith-based," and it draws a good deal of support from its faith communities.

The ceremony concluded with a reading from Isaiah. Two of the new families are Catholic and had invited the local priest to bless their homes. Everyone in the street joined Julio and his family in their new house, where a little altar had been arranged on the kitchen counter. Moving easily between Spanish and English, the priest quoted a passage from Luke

and then part of the 23rd Psalm. He asked all who wished to do so to join hands and repeat the Lord's Prayer. An indistinguishable blend of Spanish and English followed. From across the room, I saw Simeko marveling at yet another "American" experience.

When we emerged, the sawhorses had been rearranged yet again, this time supporting long planks filled with steaming trays of pungent Salvadorian food. Peeling a husk from something purple that look like a tamale, I sat on the curb and looked around. Still no sign of Harrison Ford, but even though I had known these people for only a few hours, the sense of community was complete. *

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transplanted kids or aging parents or to flee our less-than-kind winters. Those of us still here have become somewhat defensive about our decision to stay. One wonders if anyone really wants to live and die here or if it only happens by default or the lack of resources to move to "better climes." I often joke that if they don't carry me out feet first, I'll be the one left to turn out the lights.

I know that our ward is not unique. I also know that there are wards with much more severe problems, where people hold two or three jobs, where teachers don't show up, and where the bishop looks like he's always on High Alert. I think the transience that we experience is endemic in society at large, and I think there is a price to pay. Perhaps technology, which affords us easier access to instant

communication and travel, can soften the impact of impermanence, but I think there will always be something missing. To say that the Church is the same everywhere we go is true in that the Savior is always at the core, but I always feel a little piece of my heart has gone out the door as this year's crop begins to pack their bags. *

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